

Massage Benefits for Cancer

This complementary therapy can ease uncomfortable symptoms.

by Sara Altshul

A treatment that can relieve cancer patients' nausea, pain, fatigue, and depression sounds too good to be true. But the longest (3 years) and largest (including 1,290 patients) study of its kind verifies that massage eases these and other cancer symptoms--at least in the short term.

Because 20 percent of all cancer patients in the United States seek massage therapy, researchers at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City decided to put it to the test. For 3 years, they asked patients who used MSKCC's own massage therapy program to rate their symptoms before and both immediately and 48 hours after.

Up to 2 days later, patients reported that their levels of anxiety dropped by 52 percent; pain, 40 percent; fatigue, 41 percent; depression, 31 percent; and nausea, 21 percent. Compared with standard drug therapies for these symptoms, massage was as effective, cheaper, less invasive, and more comforting, not to mention free of side effects.

Not all insurance plans cover massage, which can cost \$40 to \$80 per hour. But if your doctor writes a referral to a certified therapist, or if you get the therapy as a hospital patient, it's more likely to be covered. To find a therapist, call the American Massage Therapy Association toll-free at (888) 843-2682.

Former Prevention alternative medicine editor Sara Altshul is now a freelance writer based in Rome, Italy.