



*Massage Today*

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## **Cancer Patients Look to Massage for Pain Relief**

By Kathryn Feather

It's the word that strikes fear into the heart of anyone who hears it. You hear the doctor talking, you hear the dreaded "C" word, but you can't believe it's your life being discussed. You come to the realization that it's true: you have cancer.

Suddenly your life changes, and you have to tell your family, discuss treatment options and medications. Your life becomes a whirlwind of hospital and doctor visits as you try and keep your head above water. The emotional and physical pain can be overwhelming. The options presented might address one, but not the other, so where do you turn when it feels as though the world is closing in on you?

Many people find that the help available to patients as they fight this disease or recover from its effects isn't enough to deal with the pain and discomfort it causes. Many turn to massage and other forms of alternative therapies as a last resort, only to find it's exactly what they need.

The *2005 Consumer Survey* released by the American Massage Therapy Association revealed that the use of massage was tied with medication as the preferred form of pain relief. Twenty-eight percent of those who responded to the survey ranked massage and medication as the form of treatment that brought them the greatest pain relief, with nearly 46 percent of those polled having had a massage at some time to relieve pain. More than half of the respondents in the 18-to-34 age group had a massage for the relief of pain. The survey also showed that 93 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that massage therapy can be effective in reducing pain.

These results are nothing new to breast cancer patient Jenna Glazer. "It's given me a calm place, an hour during the day where I don't think about cancer, where I focus on relaxation, where I focus on healing," Glazer said. Wendy Miner, a member of the Integrative Medicine Service at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, said, "Our patients typically come in with a number of complaints nausea, fatigue, anxiety,

pain, depression and massage is very effective in reducing those complaints as much as 50 percent."

Breast cancer survivor Sheila White also knows the benefits of massage when dealing with pain. In 2004, White had a lumpectomy to remove a cancerous tumor; she also had 12 lymph nodes removed from under her arms. White experienced pain in her chest and under her arms after the surgery, but the pain medication she was prescribed just wasn't dealing with the problem. After several months of pain, she was diagnosed with lymphedema, a condition in which fluid builds up in the lymph nodes and causes swelling. Another doctor finally prescribed massage therapy to deal with the condition, and White couldn't be happier. "I've improved 90 percent of what I was," she said. "I fought it and fought it to not take [prescription pain medication]. The pain was winning, but now I'm in control. I'm controlling the pain," she said.

The Cancer Treatment Centers of America are one health care group emphasizing the type of care that combines high-tech surgery and traditional therapies with complementary medicine that focuses on nutrition, spiritual support, mind-body medicine and naturopathic medicine. They utilize an integrated team that combines the strengths of occupational, physical, speech and massage therapists to meet a patient's needs. The types of massage therapy used include Swedish massage, reflexology, lymphedema massage and myofascial release.

"It [massage] does a lot to lower respiratory rate and blood pressure," Miner said. "It also does a lot to decrease the different stress hormones and to increase natural killer cells and lymphocytes, which help with the immune system."

Patients now have more options to explore when dealing with the stress and trauma that comes with a fight against the disease. Perhaps now the fight against the dreaded "C" word won't seem like quite so hopeless and daunting a task.

#### *Resources*

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