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Reinforcing the Value of Massage for Back Pain

***Annals of Internal Medicine* Report: Massage is a Successful, Cost-Effective Treatment**

By Editorial Staff

Researchers from the Seattle-based Group Health Cooperative's Center for Health Studies (CHS) released a report in the June 3 *Annals of Internal Medicine* that massage therapy is a successful and cost-effective treatment for back pain - possibly even more so than chiropractic or acupuncture treatments.

The report was compiled from an in-depth study of scientific data from recent reviews of randomized controlled trials evaluating acupuncture, massage therapy and spinal adjustments; and other recent trials.

"Many Americans are using alternative treatments for back pain and paying a fair amount of money for them - either out-of-pocket or through insurance," said CHS senior investigator and lead author of the report, Daniel C.

Cherkin, PhD. "So, it's important to know whether these treatments are effective and whether they should be made more widely available."

The research report concluded that although the three treatments are all safe in treating back pain, massage therapy was the only one to demonstrate a positive effect on back pain.

The study also noted that while spinal manipulation has some positive effects on back pain, its benefits are similar to those of conventional medicine, such as over-the-counter pain relievers and some forms of physical therapy.

The research on the effects of acupuncture on back pain was inconclusive, although Cherkin and his colleagues are currently conducting a five-year study on the subject.

Researchers also reported that massage may actually reduce the cost of care following initial treatments for back pain. There was insufficient evidence that acupuncture or spinal manipulation could lower health-care costs.

More than half of Americans seek treatment for back pain each year, spending more than \$25 billion on medical care, with another \$50 billion spent on lost productivity and disability payments. When traditional medicine fails to treat the pain, patients turn to alternative treatments. In fact, back pain accounts for 40 percent of chiropractic visits; 20 percent of massage therapy visits; and 14 percent of visits to acupuncturists.¹

Others contributors to the review are Karen Sherman, PhD; Richard A. Deyo, MD; and Paul G. Shekelle, MD, PhD.

For more research information on the benefits of massage for back pain, see the front page article in the September 2001 issue of *Massage Today*, "Massage for Back Pain: Let's Look at the Research," at www.massagetoday.com/archives/2001/09/01.html.

For more information on this study, contact the Center for Health Studies at (206) 287-2653 or visit www.ghc.org.

References

1. Massage works well for back pain, www.newswise.com/newswise.pp/pparticles/38551.GHC.html.
2. A review of the evidence for the effectiveness, safety, and cost of acupuncture, massage therapy, and spinal manipulation for back pain. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 3 June 2003, V-138, No-11, www.annals.org/issues/v138n11/toc.html.



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