

**AUG - SEPT 2007**

Massage Therapy and Arthritis... ¹ More than 2000 years ago Hippocrates wrote that doctors should be experienced in “rubbing that can bind a joint that is loose and loosen a joint that is too hard”. Today, massage is still a popular way to manage arthritis pain, and like physical and occupational therapies, massage can improve joint movement, relax tense muscles, and stimulate the flow of blood and nutrients to the skin and underlying tissues. What’s more, it just feels good, and the relaxation it brings can help beat the cycle of pain and stress that often goes along with arthritis. Massage therapy can not cure or stop the progression of any arthritic condition, but it can help ease the symptoms associated with inflammation, and help improve the quality of life for someone affected by the condition. While massage has been shown to relieve chronic lower back pain and musculoskeletal disorders, there has not been a lot of arthritis research measuring the effectiveness of massage compared to, or in conjunction with conventional treatments like NSAID’s. ²In one study at the Yale University School of Medicine, conducted by David Katz, MD; adults with osteoarthritis of the knee were randomly assigned to receive massage therapy, or to a wait-list control group. All participants continued previous treatments and medications. After eight weeks, participants receiving massage had improved flexibility and range of motion, and reduced pain. Those in the control group showed little change in symptoms until they too, started receiving massage, then during weeks nine through sixteen, they experienced benefits similar to the first group. Interestingly, the benefits did not go away even when the massages were stopped. “The very significant therapeutic response over eight weeks of therapy persisted eight weeks later,” Katz said. “Two months after the last massage, they were still significantly better than baseline, and significantly better than the control group. That exceeded our expectations.” ³Another study at the University of Miami School of Medicine compared adults with wrist/hand arthritis who received massage once a week and who were taught daily self massage, against a control group undergoing standard treatment that included medication and physical therapy. The massage therapy group reported less pain, lower anxiety and depressed mood scores, and demonstrated greater grip strength after their sessions and across the study period. ⁴A Mayo Clinic newsletter identifies massage as one of the common forms of complementary and alternative medicine for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, and in many cases treatment can be self administered, or given by a caregiver or parent when properly taught. ⁵The *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* published a study where “Children with mild to moderate juvenile rheumatoid arthritis were massaged by their parents 15 minutes a day for 30 days (and a control group engaged in relaxation therapy). The children’s anxiety and stress hormone (cortisol) levels were immediately decreased by the massage, and over the 30 day period their pain decreased on self-reports, parent reports, and their physician’s assessment of pain (both the incidence and severity) and pain-limiting activities.” At our practice, Medicare and most insurance will cover therapeutic massage for arthritis, when treatment is administered in our office by qualified therapists.

1. Siegel, Seeds, Szczukowski, Testa.; August 2007, *All About Arthritis*: DePuy Orthopedics, div of Johnson & Johnson
2. Katz, David: December 11, 2006, *Archives of Internal Medicine*
3. Mayo Clinic Staff: Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research; March 3, 2006
4. Field, Diego, Hernandez-Reif, Shea; *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* (2007) 11, 21-24
5. Field, Hernandez-Reif, Seligman, Krasnegor, Sunshine; (1997) Juvenile rheumatoid arthritis: Benefits from massage therapy.

Please consider asking your doctor for a referral to our practice if you are bothered by pain, suffer from an injury, or are planning a surgery. You can print a referral form (Rx form) from the home page of this website.