

Massage Found Effective for Chronic Hand Arthritis

By Julie Engebretson

Arthritis is one of the most common chronic diseases in the United States, and this inflammatory condition frequently plagues the hands. It's estimated that 1 in 5, or 46 million U.S. adults, live with arthritis today; and over 38 percent, or 17 million adults, report some limitation of their day-to-day activities because of this debilitating condition.¹ Several non pharmaceutical approaches have been proven to increase joint function and alleviate the pain associated with arthritis, including increased physical activity and losing excess weight. And now, following a recent study completed by the Touch Research Institute (TRI) and funded by BIOTONE, arthritis sufferers can add massage therapy to the list.

Under the TRI-conducted study, 22 adults ages 20 to 65 who complained of wrist and/or hand arthritis were assigned randomly to either a standard treatment control group or a massage therapy group. Adults in the massage therapy group received regular massage on the affected wrist/hand once per week over the course of four weeks. Each adult in the massage group also was instructed to self-massage his or her wrist/hand at home daily.

Meanwhile, adults in the standard treatment group did not receive any such massage therapy over the four-week period.

Subjects who received regular massage therapy experienced a lowered level of anxiety and depressed mood score after the first and last sessions, and reported less pain and greater grip strength by the end of the four-week study. All in all, the massage therapy group exhibited greater improvement than did the standard treatment group on all measures.

“While massage therapy has decreased pain in several pain syndromes including fibromyalgia, lower back pain and migraine, this is the first report of pain reduction in hand arthritis following massage therapy,” said Dr. Tiffany Field, TRI director. “Up to now, many other interventions to alleviate hand pain have been tried;

medications, physical therapy and various forms of exercise. The results of this study are very encouraging for the application of massage therapy as a complementary alternative treatment for hand arthritis.”

“BIOTONE continues to fund research regarding the different effects of massage therapy on consumers’ health and well-being,” said Jean Shea, BIOTONE founder and CEO.

The company is funding two studies in 2006 through the Massage Therapy Foundation. These involve a study, in cooperation with the Southeast Burn Foundation, of therapeutic massage for pediatric burn survivors; and the effects of five-minute foot massages on physiological measures and subjective ratings in pediatric intensive care unit patients at Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago. The hope is that the results of both studies will not only improve the lives of young patients, but also increase awareness and further acceptance of massage and touch therapy as an effective form of alternative treatment.

“The arthritis, breast cancer and back pain studies we funded all have shown positive results that are very encouraging,” Shea said.

Looking ahead, and considering an aging boomer generation, it’s projected that nearly 67 million, or 25 percent, of U.S. adults will have doctor-diagnosed arthritis by the year 2030,¹ Arthritis sufferers have ample reason to make an appointment with a massage therapist today.

Resources

1. Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Arthritis.” www.cdc.gov/arthritis/.
2. Press release. “New BIOTONE Funded Study Indicates Massage Therapy Reduces Hand Arthritis Pain and Increases Grip Strength.” October 16, 2006.



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