

# Anxiety and Stress

## Can Massage Therapy Help?

### Facts Sheet

- Approximately 15% of the New Zealand population are affected by anxiety disorders.<sup>1</sup>
- A single session may help relieve feelings of stress and anxiety. Massage works by reducing painful feelings (Gate Control Theory of Pain Reduction), enabling deeper sleep (which can also help reduce pain). It can also boost your immune system and relax your tense muscles.<sup>2</sup>
- Generally a series of treatments is recommended to allow a longer lasting effect. It is also beneficial to include a regular massage for ongoing wellbeing. That may be weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on an individual's workload and stress levels.
- One session of Massage Therapy reduces state<sup>2</sup> anxiety, blood pressure, and heart rate.<sup>2</sup>
- Multiple sessions reduced delayed assessment of pain. Reductions of trait anxiety and depression were massage therapy's largest effects (in an overview of all massage research), with a course of treatment providing benefits similar in magnitude to those of psychotherapy.<sup>2</sup>
- Anxiety can lead to poor social functioning, unemployment and decreased resistance to illness.<sup>2</sup>
- Massage therapy has had good results for alleviating pain, tension, and anxiety. A study of the efficacy and feasibility of massage therapy delivered postoperatively for cardiovascular surgery. Patients were randomized to receive a massage or to have quiet relaxation time (control). In total 113 patients partook. Patients receiving massage therapy had significantly decreased pain, anxiety, and tension. Patients were highly satisfied with the intervention.<sup>3</sup>
- A 30-minute back massage was given daily for a 5-day period to 52 hospitalized depressed and adjustment disorder children and adolescents. Compared with a control group who viewed relaxing videotapes, the massaged subjects were less depressed and anxious and had lower saliva cortisol levels after the massage. Also the nurses rated the subjects as being less anxious and more cooperative on the last day of the study, and nighttime sleep increased over this period.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-topics/anxiety/>

<sup>2</sup> A Meta-Analysis of Massage Therapy Research. Moyer, Christopher A.; Rounds, James; Hannum, James W. Psychological Bulletin, Vol 130(1), Jan 2004, 3-18.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20347836>

<sup>4</sup> *J. Am. Acad. Child Adolesc. Psychiatry*, 1992, 31, 1:125-131.