Massage Therapy for People With Spinal Cord Injuries

Massage therapy is the manipulation of soft tissues of the body including, muscles, connective tissues, tendons, ligaments and joints. Massage Therapy is a clinically-oriented healthcare option that helps alleviate the discomfort associated with both acute and chronic pain conditions.

How can massage therapy help?

Massage Therapy is a safe and effective option for reducing pain and fatigue, and improving range of motion as well as overall quality of life in people with spinal cord injuries. Anxiety is a prevalent problem among people with spinal cord injuries, with up to 45% of individuals experiencing excessive worry, fear or panic. Massage therapy is effective for treating the physical symptoms of anxiety and reducing patients’ perceptions of anxiety.

Pain Management

Physical therapies, including massage therapy, were found to be the most effective treatments for pain management overall, with participants indicating their pain was considerably reduced. In particular, neuropathic pain resulting from spinal cord injury can be relieved by massage therapy. Many people with spinal cord injuries are wheelchair users, and a form of massage therapy has been found to reduce chronic shoulder pain in wheelchair users.

Range of Motion and quality of life

People with spinal cord injuries who received massage therapy treatments experienced both an improvement in muscle strength and in wrist range of motion. The ability to participate in social, work, leisure and family activities has a positive impact on quality of life, and physical therapy treatments have been found to have a positive effect on participation after a spinal cord injury.

Anxiety

Traumatic spinal cord injury patients, especially those under 50, can have a higher risk of anxiety and depression post discharge, especially in those patients under 50. Patients have reported significant decreases in their anxiety levels after massage therapy treatments, and massage therapy has also been found to reduce vital signs associated with anxiety including pulse, respiratory rate, and systolic blood pressure. This reduction of anxiety can have a very positive impact on a patient’s overall wellbeing.

Conclusion

Individuals with spinal cord injuries are already trying a variety of alternative treatments for symptom managements, with massage therapy being the most common. Patients consider these non-
pharmacological options, including massage therapy, to be highly effective.[ix] Massage therapy is a safe and effective treatment option to manage pain and other symptoms in people with spinal cord injuries.

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