



## Massage Therapy for Individuals in Long-Term Care

Massage therapy is increasingly utilized as a valuable addition to care for people in long-term care facilities. Massage therapy can help the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of those in long-term care homes, and can increase quality of life. Benefits can include reduced levels of pain, improved physical function, reduced levels of stress and agitation, as well as the management of symptoms associated with anxiety and depression.

Massage therapy is the manipulation of soft tissues of the body including, muscles, connective tissues, tendons, ligaments and joints. Massage therapy is a safe and effective health care option, and Registered Massage Therapists can adjust their treatments based on an individual patient's health and comfort or mobility level, as well as account for different treatment environments such as sitting in a chair or lying in a bed.

### Pain

The prevalence of musculoskeletal conditions among residents in long-term care homes has grown over the past few years, with nearly a third of residents suffering from some form of arthritis.<sup>1,2</sup> Osteoarthritis is increasingly prevalent with age, and massage therapy is an effective treatment option to reduce pain and improve function in people with osteoarthritis of the knee.<sup>3</sup> The majority of residents of long-term care homes are over the age of 85, and chronic pain is common among this population.<sup>4</sup> Massage therapy can be particularly effective for reducing pain and improving function in the treatment of low-back pain. For elderly individuals experiencing persistent pain, massage therapy is associated with less self-reported limitation due to physical or emotional issues, better social functioning, and better overall health.<sup>5</sup>

### Agitation and Dementia

The majority of residents in long-term care homes have some form of cognitive impairment with dementia being the most common. Agitation is a common symptom of distress in people with dementia, and residents of long-term care homes suffering from agitation and dementia have been reported to

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2016). Continuing Care Reporting System: Profile of Residents in Continuing Care Facilities 2015-2016. Ottawa: CIHI.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2010). Continuing Care Reporting System: Profile of Residents in Continuing Care Facilities 2009-2010. Ottawa: CIHI.

<sup>3</sup> Perlman, A.I., Sabina, A., Williams, A., Njike, V.Y., Katz, D.L. (2006). Massage therapy for osteoarthritis of the knee: a randomized controlled trial. *Arch Intern Med*, 166(22): 2533-2538.

<sup>4</sup> Larsson, C., Hansson, E.E., Sundquist, K., Jakobsson, U. (2017). Chronic pain in older adults: prevalence, incidence, and risk factors. *Scand J Rheumatol*, 46(4):317-325.

<sup>5</sup> Munk, N., Kruger, T., Zanjani, F. (2011). Massage therapy usage and reported health in older adults experiencing persistent pain. *J Altern Complement Med*, 17(7):609-616.



have a lower quality of life.<sup>6</sup> Massage therapy, and in particular hand and face massage, has been found to reduce the levels of stress and aggressive behavior in patients with dementia.<sup>7</sup> Individuals with dementia experienced lower agitation during massage therapy treatment, and their agitation remained lower at follow-up. This included a reduction in physical signs of agitation such as wandering, pacing and resisting care.<sup>8</sup> There is also a trend towards greater chronic pain relief for patients with dementia in a long-term care setting following massage therapy treatments.<sup>9</sup>

## Mood Disorders

Mood disorders are common among residents in long-term care homes with 40% suffering from disorders such as anxiety or depression.<sup>1</sup> There was reduction in levels of state anxiety and improvements in health-related quality of life following the application of a massage therapy treatment.<sup>10,11</sup> Massage therapy may also reduce self-reported anxiety in elderly women.<sup>12</sup> It may be the opportunity to be in the close proximity of another person offered by massage therapy that contributes to reduced anxiety and feelings of comfort.<sup>13</sup>

## Safe and Effective Health Care Option

Registered Massage Therapists are increasingly being integrated into long-term care environments to compliment residents' usual medical care and help improve their overall quality of life. Massage therapy is a safe and effective treatment option for many of the concerns faced by residents in long-term care homes. Registered Massage Therapists can modify the duration of the treatment, the patient's position during treatment, and the level of pressure used during the treatment for more medically fragile patients. They are also capable of working around various types of medical equipment and adapting their treatments to accommodate interruptions by other care staff when required. Registered Massage Therapists also pay close attention to a patient's body language and other nonverbal cues, and will communicate with the patient's caregivers and other members of the health care team when appropriate. Massage therapy fits well into the patient-centred focus of long-term care homes, focusing primarily on improving quality of life and ensuring comfort.

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<sup>6</sup> Livingston, G., Barber, J., Marston, L., Rapaport, P., Livingston, D., Cousins, S., ... Cooper, C. (2017). Prevalence of and associations with agitation in residents with dementia living in care homes: MARQUE cross-sectional study. *BJPsych Open*, 3(4): 171–178.

<sup>7</sup> Keshavarz, S., Mirzaei, T., & Ravari, A. (2018). Effect of Head and Face Massage on Agitation in Elderly Alzheimer's Disease Patients. *Int J Evid Base Healthc*, 7(4): 46-54.

<sup>8</sup> Cai, F.F. and Zhang, H. (2015). Effect of therapeutic touch on agitated behavior in elderly patients with dementia: A review. *Int J Nurs Sci*, 2(3):324-328.

<sup>9</sup> Kapoor, Y., and Orr, R. (2015). Effect of therapeutic massage on pain in patients with dementia. *Dementia (London)*, pii: 1471301215583391.

<sup>10</sup> Eguchi, E., Funakubo, N., Tomooka, K., Ohira, T., Ogino, K., & Tanigawa, T. (2016). The Effects of Aroma Foot Massage on Blood Pressure and Anxiety in Japanese Community-Dwelling Men and Women: A Crossover Randomized Controlled Trial. *Plos One*, 11(3): e0151712

<sup>11</sup> McMillan, K., Glaseer, D., Radovich, P. (2018). The Effect of Massage on Pain and Anxiety in Hospitalized Patients: An Observational Study. *Medsurg Nursing*, 27(1): 14-19.

<sup>12</sup> Rho, K., Han, S., Kim, K., & Lee, M. S. (2006). Effects of aromatherapy massage on anxiety and self-esteem in Korean elderly women: a pilot study. *Int J Neurosci*, 116(12): 1447-1455.

<sup>13</sup> Moyle, W., Cooke, M. L., Beattie, E., Shum, D. H., O'Dwyer, S. T., Barrett, S., & Sung, B. (2014). Foot Massage and Physiological Stress in People with Dementia: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *J Altern Complement Med*, 20(4): 305-311

