



Peripheral Neuropathy: How Can Massage Therapy Help?

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Disclaimer: The presenter is not a doctor and does not give medical advice. The content of this presentation is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical, diagnosis or treatment. The presenter does not claim to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any condition or disease. The information offered in this presentation is for educational and informational purposes only. There is much research taking place now regarding neuropathy and complementary/integrative treatments such as massage. Always seek the advice of your physician before starting any form of therapy.

What is Neuropathy?

- **A collection of disorders that occurs when nerves of the peripheral nervous system (outside of the brain and spinal cord) are damaged.**
- **Usually called peripheral neuropathy, it is most commonly due to damage to nerve axons.**

Types of Nerves

- **Sensory** nerves tells us how things feel, such as coldness or pain.
- **Motor** nerves stimulate muscle contraction and initiate movement.

Types of Nerves

- **Autonomic** nerves control functions that our bodies don't consciously regulate, such as breathing and heart rate. It can affect our internal organs (heart, bladder, intestines and blood vessels.)

Types of Nerves/**Types of Pain**

- **Sensory nerves** tells us how things feel, such as coldness or pain. **You might feel: numbness/tingling/shooting pain, burning pain, or not being able to sense cold or heat.**
- **Motor nerves** stimulate muscle contraction and initiate movement. **You might feel: weakness, have trouble walking or feeling off-balance.**

Types of Nerves/**Types of Pain**

- **Autonomic nerves control functions that our bodies don't consciously regulate, such as breathing and heart rate. It can affect our internal organs (heart, bladder, intestines and blood vessels.) **You might feel: constipation or dizziness.****

Ways to **Treat** Your Neuropathy

- **Medications – unfortunately, some medications do include side effects.**
- **Massage – helps to induce relaxation, reduce anxiety and promote healing**
- **Reflexology – applies specific manual techniques on reflex points/areas to promote homeostasis. Benefits may include relieving pain, improving nausea, decreasing anxiety and depression, boosting immune system**

Ways to **Treat** Your Neuropathy

- **Yoga**
- **Acupuncture**
- **Meditation**
- **Certain vitamins/supplements – consult your doctor for guidance and supervision when using vitamins and supplements.**

Ways to **Manage** your Neuropathy: Some Lifestyle Changes

- **Take care of your feet and hands – skin care is important. Keeping skin moisturized is vital to skin health.**
- **Exercise – right type of exercise is vital. Stretch and move, if you can! Always check with your doctor first.**

Ways to **Manage** your Neuropathy: Some Lifestyle Changes

- **Eat healthy meals – A nutritious diet may help you manage your symptoms. For best results, seek specified guidance from your doctor or a registered dietitian. “Let food be thy medicine.” ~Hippocrates**
- **Avoid eating certain foods or contain ingredients, such as sugar (especially for diabetic neuropathy).**

Ways to **Manage** your Neuropathy: Some Lifestyle Changes

- **Massage your hands and feet or have someone massage them for you. Ask your doctor for the name of a qualified massage therapist who can help you.**
- **Avoid cramped positions that can cause nerve damage, such as keeping your knees crossed or lean on your elbows for long periods of time.**

Ways to **Manage** your Neuropathy: Some Lifestyle Changes

- Neuropathy takes away one's quality of life, causes one to exercise less, and may bring about depression – work together with your supportive, integrative medical team.
- Suggestion: Keep a journal as to how your symptoms increase or decrease. Measure it with a pain scale (0-10, 10 being excruciating pain) and share this information with your medical team.
- Be patient – results will “inch forward.”

Potential Benefits of Massage Therapy

- **Increases circulation** – the manual therapy can pump blood, water, oxygen, and lymph to and from the area. The increased blood flow dissolves sugars, salts, proteins and fats and brings nutrients to heal surrounding tissues. Increased blood flow and oxygen nourish the nerves.

Potential Benefits of Massage Therapy

- **Restores nerve integrity** – the manual therapy pressure increases the chemicals sent along nerve pathways to the brain, helping to re-establish the communication between the central nervous system and the peripheral nervous system.

More Potential Benefits of Massage Therapy

- **Allows muscles to relax**
- **Lessens fatigue**
- **Reduces inflammation**
- **Increases flexibility and range of motion**
- **May temporarily relieve pain**

More Potential Benefits of Massage Therapy

- Improves emotional state and may reduce stress
- Enhances well-being by stimulating the release of serotonin (a natural pain-killing and mood-elevating endorphin) and reducing the level of cortisol, a stress hormone that produces pain

Massage Therapy + Sleep = Improved Healing

- Massage relaxes tense and painful muscles, and improves blood flow to muscles and nerves.
- A study by the University of Auckland in New Zealand and the Cancer Prevention Research Center at University of Queensland in Australia found that people suffering from migraines who received weekly massage therapy sessions for five weeks experienced **improved levels of restful sleep, which has a role in reducing pain and improving healing.**

What Happens During Sleep?

- **“Lack of sleep can affect your immune system. Long-term lack of sleep can increase risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.**
- **During sleep, your immune system releases proteins called cytokines, some of which help promote a deeper sleep.**
- **Certain cytokines need to increase when you have an infection, inflammation or under stress.**
- **Sleep deprivation may decrease production of these protective cytokines.**
- **In addition, infection-fighting antibodies and cells are reduced during periods when you do not get enough sleep.”**

**~ Dr. Timothy Morgenthaler, MD
Mayo Clinic.com**

Massage Can Help Manage Stress

“Experts estimate that upwards of ninety percent of disease is stress related. And perhaps nothing ages us faster, internally and externally, than high stress. While eliminating anxiety and pressure altogether in this fast paced world may be idealistic, massage can, without a doubt, help manage stress. Clients often report a sense of perspective and clarity after receiving a massage. **The emotional balance bodywork provides can often be just as vital and valuable as the more tangible physical benefits.**”

~ [Massage Therapy.com](http://MassageTherapy.com)

Find a Qualified Massage Therapist

- **Clinical Knowledge and Experience**
- **Compassion**
- **Safety consciousness**
- **A collaborative attitude**

Massage can be used as an integrative therapy with acupuncture, physical therapy, reflexology, etc.

Caution

Massage can reduce pain and improve well-being, but it may also aggravate other conditions. **Techniques used in a foot massage for someone with neuropathy is much different than a regular foot massage that you might receive during a pedicure, especially if you have hypersensitive nerves.**

Caution

Remember – patients with numbness may not be able to give accurate feedback to the massage therapist, which could result in pressure that is too deep and could possibly cause more tissue damage.

Caution

If something doesn't feel good, is painful, let your therapist know immediately. Stay alert to your body's signals. Your therapist has been trained to know what to do next.

Work Together

Patient homework – massage therapist and patient work together as a team to help reduce the neuropathy symptoms. Several sessions or more may be needed.

Self-Massage Therapy Tips

- **If you are doing a self-massage at home and you experience sharp, stabbing pain, stop what you are doing and contact your therapist or doctor.**
- **For self-massage: remember to keep the massage pressure gentle and have your massage/physical therapist approve of any massage techniques before using them at home.**
- **Only very gentle massage should be utilized at first, keeping in mind that if you have numbness, you may not be able to feel how the treatment is affecting you.**

Research on Massage Therapy

- ***Neurology Now*®** , May/June 2008, Volume 4(3) p 26-28, 30. Healing Touch, by Jennifer Haupt. An official publication of the American Academy of Neurology, *Neurology Now*® is an award-winning magazine written for people with neurologic disorders and their caregivers.
- **Abstract: Massage therapy may offer pain relief for a number of neurological conditions.**

Research on Massage Therapy

- **Studies from the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami**
- **Reported benefits: In one study, multiple sclerosis (MS) patients who received a 45-minute massage twice a week for five weeks experienced improvements in mood and body image.**

Research on Massage Therapy

- In another study, MS patients who received 11 weeks of reflexology treatment on feet + calf massage showed improvements in urinary symptoms, spasticity (stiff or rigid muscles which may include involuntary movements such as spasms and clonus, a series of fast involuntary contractions) and paresthesias (skin tingling, pricking or numbness).**

Research on Massage Therapy

- **Studies from the University of San Francisco and the Quan Yin Healing Arts Center in San Francisco**
- **Reported **benefits of acupuncture and massage** for 16 HIV patients who reported neuropathy in their faces and extremities. After 16 weeks (10 sessions), participants showed nearly a 10% increase in their vitality and energy; some reported a decrease in their neuropathic symptoms, with relief lasting an average of two-three days.**
- **Several people reported a decrease in tingling and numbness of hands and feet and most reported feeling more relaxed.**

Credits

- **Internet**

**MayoClinic, Medical News Today, *Massage Today*,
LIVESTRONG, National Comprehensive Cancer
Network, American Massage Therapy Association**

- **Articles**

***Diagnosing and Treating Peripheral Neuropathy* by
Todd Levine, MD**

***Neurology Now*®, *Healing Touch*, by Jennifer Haupt
May/June 2008, Volume 4(3) p 26-28, 30.**

MassageTherapy.com

Thank You!

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