

Massage Research

Ten years ago, the effects of massage were not well understood. Therapists knew that it could increase blood and lymph circulation, decrease heart rate and blood pressure, improve mobility and reduce pain. However, the impact on a wide range of conditions had never been scientifically examined.

Massage under the microscope

Dr. Tiffany Field obtained a research grant in 1975 to study child development. In 1986, as assistant professor of pediatrics and psychology at the University of Miami, she began a landmark study on the effects of massage on premature infants.

Researchers found that with the same level of food intake, massaged premature infants gained weight 47% faster than non massaged preemies. They were more alert, active and responsive, tolerated noise better, slept better and had fewer episodes of apnea. The massaged infants also left the hospital six days earlier, at a savings of \$10,000 per infant. This led to an initial grant by Johnson & Johnson to fund the Touch Research Institute.

The power of massage

The Touch Research Institute has studied people of all ages with a variety of conditions:

- Labor pain: Massage during the first 15-minutes of each hour of labour decreased the mother's anxiety and pain, less medication was required and the length of labour was shortened.
- Migraine headaches: Massage decreased the occurrence of headaches.
- Asthma: Children with mild to severe asthma who received regular massage were better able to exhale.
- Premenstrual symptoms: After massage mood improved and anxiety decreased. Pain and symptoms of water retention also reduced.
- Juvenile diabetes: After a month of regular massage, average blood sugar levels dropped into a normal range.
- Pregnancy: Women who had massage through pregnancy showed decreased levels of stress hormones with less anxiety. There were fewer complications before and after birth including fewer premature births.

For the stressed and depressed

Massage relaxes muscles and initiates a *relaxation response*, which initiates restorative processes and counters stress.

Depression has been measured in most of the Touch Research Institute's studies, and remarkably, depression has decreased in every measured study.

Boosting immunity

Studies also indicate that massage decreases stress and bolsters immune function:

- Healthy female medical students received a full body massage the day before an exam. All experienced decreased anxiety, and over half had increases in disease fighting white blood cells.
- Adults and teens with HIV were massaged over one month. Both groups experienced less anxiety and produced fewer stress hormones. They also showed increases in the number of white blood cells.
- Women in a breast cancer treatment group received three massages a week for five weeks showing 80% improvement in immune function.