

Therapies

Acupuncture | Art Therapy | Counselling | Healing Imagery | **Massage** | Meditation and Mindfulness Music Therapy | Nordic Walking | Physical Activity Qigong | Reflexology | Relaxation | Shiatsu | Yoga



Massage involves a therapist moving the soft tissues of the body. Traditionally it has been used to aid wellbeing, relaxation and general health.

People with cancer, who have had massage, have said they found it relaxing and it gave them a sense of relief. Research suggests that it may help to reduce pain, depression and anxiety.

Penny Brohn UK supports massage as a safe and beneficial therapy for those with cancer, when practised by a therapist with appropriate experience and/or training.

Information on massage

This evidence-based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about massage, one of a range of complementary therapies available to support people with cancer. If you would like more information on how to access the range of services Penny Brohn UK provides, please contact our Helpline on 0303 3000 118. We are able to provide our services free of charge, thanks to the charitable donations and voluntary contributions which fund our work.

What do people who have tried massage say about it?

Research studies known as qualitative studies ask people about their experiences. They can provide information from a personal perspective, but can't tell us if a therapy is likely to work for everyone.

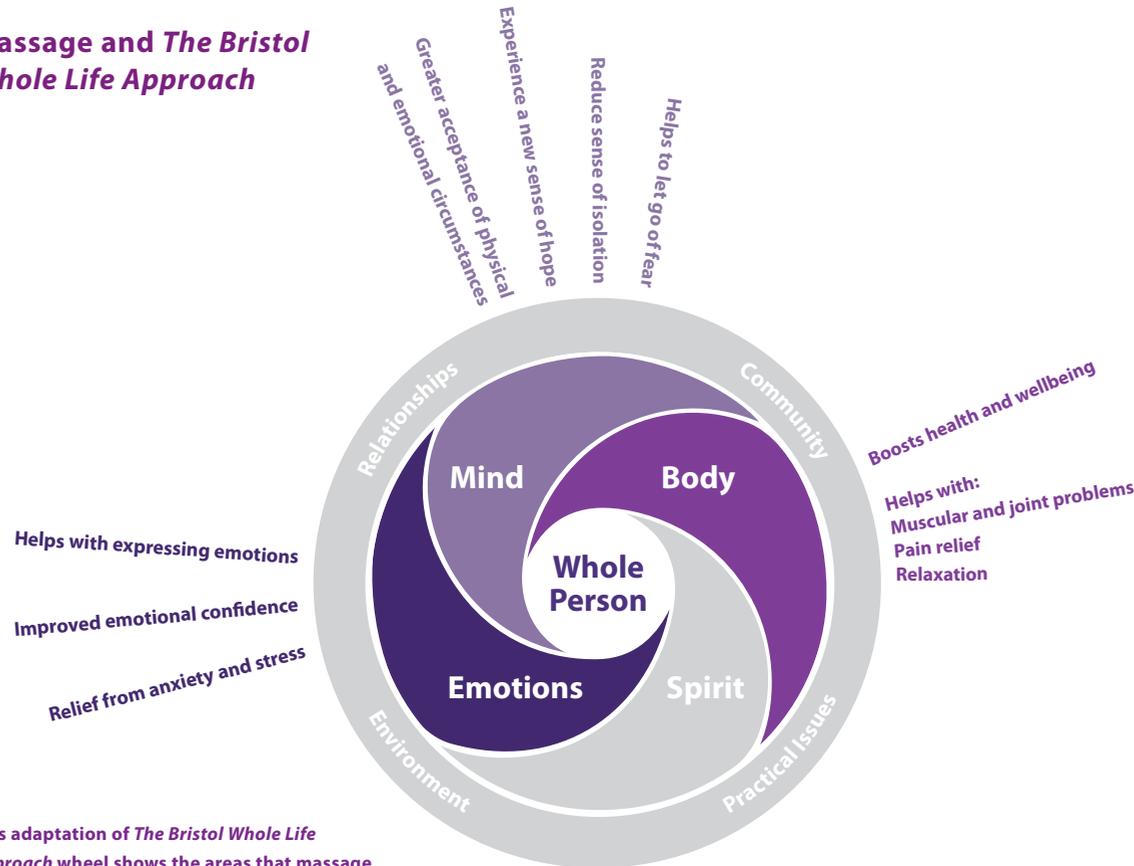
People who had massage described positive experiences. These included relief from suffering, a sense of strength, empowerment and a sense of being special.

People also said they appreciated the distraction, when it was given whilst receiving chemotherapy. They found it helped them to think more positively, was relaxing and 'felt good'.

Massage and The Bristol Whole Life Approach

This adaptation of The Bristol Whole Life Approach wheel shows the areas that massage can help with, according to providers.

(Please note that these are not the claims of Penny Brohn UK.)



What happens in a massage session?

- A session can last from 15 minutes to an hour. Shorter sessions are used when a specific area such as the shoulders or feet are to be treated. A full body massage requires longer.
- Massage may be given when lying on a massage table or when seated on a chair. This will depend on the area to be treated. Music might be played during the session. Most types of massage require direct contact with the skin, so the removal of some clothing is essential. The therapist will give the client privacy to do this. Massage therapists often use towels or sheets to cover parts of the body they are not working on.

- Oil or lotion can be used to lubricate the massage and prevent discomfort from friction. The types of techniques used can vary from light, smooth and gentle to deep and vigorous. Techniques include long strokes, kneading, quick tapping, friction, stretching and pressure on specific points. The therapist may use their forearms and elbows and even specially designed massage tools as well as their hands.

More about massage

Massage is an ancient practice. There are references to its use as far back as 2700BC in China. Records suggest it was also used in Japanese, Arabic, Egyptian, Indian, Persian, Greek and Roman cultures. Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, described the use of massage techniques for a wide range of conditions from sprains to constipation. Modern massage involves the manipulation of muscles and soft tissues to aid health, wellbeing, circulation and relaxation. The level of touch used can be light and gentle or deep and quite strong. Massage in Europe has developed into many different practices which draw on various traditions, most commonly on Swedish massage techniques. Massage does not include practices that involve manipulation of the skeletal system, such as osteopathy and chiropractics. Therapists often use a combination of techniques. Some of the common techniques include:

- **Swedish or classical massage** – uses five basic techniques: vibration, tapping, kneading, stroking and friction.
- **Holistic massage** – takes into account the whole person, mind, body and spirit.
- **Aromatherapy massage** – uses aromatherapy oils to add to the effects of the massage.
- **Sports massage** – to help athletes prevent or heal injuries.
- **Deep tissue massage** – this reaches beyond the superficial layer of muscles to the muscles underneath.

Is massage safe?

It is considered safe to have gentle massage on areas that have not been affected by cancer. It should be practised by a therapist who is fully qualified and insured (check the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council website for a list of practitioners who have met national training standards). Deep massage is not appropriate for areas affected by active cancer or people with low platelet counts. If you are undergoing treatment for cancer, choose a massage therapist who is experienced at working with people with cancer. Areas of broken skin, infections and where you have had recent surgery or radiation therapy should be avoided.

Are there any legal issues?

There is no legal regulation of massage therapists in the UK at present. Most therapists are well trained and are part of one of a number of professional associations. The General Council for Massage Therapy is promoting the self-regulation of massage therapists.

What is the evidence on massage?

Three reviews of research found that massage may have a beneficial effect on cancer-related pain, depression and anxiety and four reviews found that massage reduced cancer-related pain. However another review did not find these effects. Other benefits of massage included a reduction in nausea, anger, stress and fatigue.

A full list of references and an extended summary of the research literature is available upon request from our Helpline.

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Contact us

Helpline: 0303 3000 118
Weekdays 9.30am to 5.00pm
(24-hour answerphone)

Email: helpline@pennybrohn.org.uk

Penny Brohn UK
Chapel Pill Lane, Pill, Bristol BS20 0HH

Statement

Our information and research is designed to help you make informed choices about the services that we provide. From time to time, for illustrative purposes, we may make reference to commonly available products (such as relaxation CDs and popular self-help books). We do not endorse or advertise the use of any specific product.

Disclaimer:

While we make every effort to use up-to-date and reliable sources, we cannot accept liability for errors in the sources that we use and also cannot guarantee to find all the information relevant to your enquiry or request. All responsibility for interpretation of and action upon that information rests with you. This information and advice is offered on the understanding that if you intend to support your treatment with complementary or alternative approaches, then it is advisable to consult your medical team to ensure that they have a complete understanding of your situation and the complementary or alternative approach that you are considering.

Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer

Cancer Research UK Tel: 0808 800 4040
www.cancerresearchuk.org

Macmillan Cancer Support Tel: 0808 808 0000
www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS 111 Tel: 111
www.nhs.uk

More information on complementary therapies

NHS Evidence www.evidence.nhs.uk
CAM Cancer www.cam-cancer.org/CAM-Summaries

Organisations that represent massage

General Council for Massage Therapy
Tel: 0870 850 4452 | www.gcmt.org.uk

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council
Tel: 020 3668 0406 | www.cnhc.org.uk