

# Massage & Breast Cancer

**J**ane is a breast cancer survivor. She has dealt with the diagnosis and the life-changing stress it brings. She has gone through radiation to shrink her tumor to an operable size. She endured surgery that took not only her breast, but many critical lymph nodes from her armpit as well. She has undergone chemotherapy to be sure that no rogue cells may survive. She emerges from this ordeal feeling battered and bruised inside and out. The chemo has left her thin, bald, and exhausted. She experiences lasting achiness and pain in the affected arm, where circulation is sluggish at best. Her surgical scars continue to generate pain long after they have healed. She wonders when, if ever, she'll feel like herself again. Her caregivers suggest that she "learn to live with it."

Breast cancer survivors face so many challenges. One of the most frustrating is the challenge to "learn to live with the pain" that so often follows breast cancer surgery and treatment. Wouldn't it be great if there were a therapy available that would ameliorate many of the worst side effects of breast cancer treatment? What if there was something a person could do that would reduce post-surgical pain, limit edema, and raise energy levels – all without drugs or further surgical intervention?

There is: more and more breast cancer survivors are discovering two adjunct treatments that help them to cope with the changes their illness and surgery bring about: friction therapy and massage therapy.

Many massage and bodywork therapists have traditionally been concerned about the possibility that bodywork, through its impact on the circulatory and lymphatic systems, could put cancer patients at risk of exacerbating their disease. Recently the profession has begun questioning this anxiety, and techniques have been developed that allow massage and bodywork therapists to work safely

and effectively with many cancer patients. Such therapy is done in conjunction with general cancer care, always with the knowledge and understanding of the rest of the patient's healthcare team. Friction or massage therapy is never done without the specific approval from the treating physician.

## Friction Therapy Can Reduce Post-Surgical Pain

When a person undergoes surgery for any reason, the accumulation of scar tissue can cause lasting pain. Scar tissue grows wherever the skin, muscle, fascia, or other types of tissue have been injured. When a body is recovering from injury, new fibers of dense proteins begin to knit the tissues back together. These protein fibers, called collagen, are strong and sticky. They are very good at holding things together, but they can create "adhesions" – places where layers of tissue that should move freely become literally glued together. Scar tissue adhesions can limit mobility. As the scar tissue matures it begins to contract, which limits mobility even further.

Friction therapy can reverse this process in two ways. If it is applied in the first three or four months of scar tissue formation, it can influence the quality of the healing for maximum efficiency and minimize unnecessary scar tissue build-up. But even if friction therapy isn't tried until many months after the tissue has healed incorrectly, it can still free the tissue by reversing much of the adhesion process.

Friction therapy is a non-invasive, hands-on treatment performed by a skilled therapist. No oils or creams are used so there can be no gliding over the skin. The pain-producing scar tissue formation is identified first. Then the therapist uses gentle strokes, performed at a ninety-degree angle to the scar, to slowly and carefully break

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useless, pain-causing scar tissue apart. The client is then given gentle movements to perform daily at home to prevent new scar tissue from forming in the same places. The process is slow and steady, relieving the pain due to the formation of adhesive scar tissue.

## Massage Therapy and Stress Reduction

Stress has a profound impact on the body, which devastates our disease fighting mechanisms. The chemicals we secrete when we are under stress interfere with digestion and sleep, slowing down the healing process. Research with breast cancer patients has shown that massage therapy reduces the level of stress-related chemicals in the body. Breast cancer patients who receive massage also report lower levels of anxiety and depression than recipients of other interventions.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon has been observed in other populations as well.

## Massage Therapy Immune System Activity

Cortisol and adrenaline, the hormones we secrete during short and long-term stress, have been seen to diminish immune system activity. Some immune system agents that are especially disabled by a stress reaction are called natural killer cells. These natural killer cells target devel-



oping tumors for destruction.

In some populations, massage therapy has been shown to not only decrease the secretion of stress hormones, but also to increase the number of natural killer cells circulating in the blood.<sup>2</sup>

## Counteracting the Side Effects of Cancer Therapies

Radiation and chemotherapy are physically exhausting for the body. It can take every iota of energy simply to get up in the morning when you are in these stages of fighting cancer. Massage therapy helps to increase overall levels of energy by reducing unnecessary levels of muscle tension and stress that can make it hard to get the rest and sleep a person in recovery needs.

## Positive Body Image

A woman who has been through breast cancer surgery, whether it's a simple lumpectomy or a radical double mastectomy, emerges with a body that is fundamentally different from the one she began with. Many

**“You don't have to live with the pain.”**

women struggle with body image issues following surgery. Breasts can help define a woman's femininity, and to lose part or both of them can change how she feels about herself as a person. One of the most precious gifts massage therapy can give is a time of intimate non-sexual touch during which the whole goal of the session is to focus on how wonderful the client's body can feel. Time spent in the simple enjoyment of physical touch can go a long way in the jour-

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ney toward self-acceptance and the joy of being alive.

Massage therapy can increase energy, improve circulation and mobility, decrease soreness, help with body image, and alleviate stress. So the next time you ask about your pain and you're told to “learn to live with it,” be aware that you have other options. Look up a massage therapist in your area who specializes in working with cancer survivors. You don't have to live with the pain.

## Finding a Massage Therapist

It is important to remember that not all massage and bodywork therapists are trained to work with cancer survivors. There are specific precautions that accompany different stages of treatment and recovery. Make sure your massage therapist is well informed and up to date on these guidelines. Check that your therapist has received training in working with people who have had or who have cancer. Be certain that they work with your medical staff, educating them about massage therapy and obtaining their permission for different massage techniques. Be clear that they understand pertinent precautions, pressure restrictions, or any areas to avoid.

*Authored by Ben Benjamin, PhD and Ruth Werner, LMT*

# Inadequate Sleep May Harm Your Health

Taken From: The (Miami) Herald Tribune: The Health Page - Action Line, January 18, 2001

**Q:** *“I’m always hearing that you need eight hours of sleep a night, but I’m not convinced. I usually sleep around five to six hours and I don’t feel tired during the day when I’m at work. I can’t see that my performance has suffered, either.”*

– D. Jenkins, Miami

**A:** Your boss or co-workers might have a different take on the subject. Or maybe not, if you spend your weekends catching up on all the sleep you missed during the work-week.

But according to Consumer Reports on Health (CR), getting so little sleep may harm your health even if it doesn’t impair your performance.

Two good indicators of too little sleep are:

- Habitually needing an alarm clock to wake up in the morning.
- Sleeping longer on weekends and vacations than on working days.

You’re not alone in short-changing your slumber time. According to CR, only one-third of the American population gets the recommended eight hours of sleep and the average American gets less than seven.

Living with a constant sleep debt takes a mental and physical toll. Your ability to learn; your problem-solving, speaking and writing skills; your reaction time; and your stamina all decline as you pile up your sleep debt. You become moody, tense and – surprise! – you don’t get along well with anybody.

It’s not only unpleasant to be that fatigued, it’s dangerous. As many as 200,000 auto accidents a year are caused by lack of proper sleep. People who work the night shift and try to sleep during the day are most at risk of causing, or having, such accidents. They’re constantly fighting their biological clocks, which are programmed to experience two natural periods of sleepiness during the 24-hour day, regardless of the amount of sleep we’ve had in the previous 24 hours. The primary period is between about midnight

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and 7a.m., which means we’re more at risk of falling asleep at the wheel, according to the National Institutes of Health, National Center on Sleep Disorders Research. A second period of less intense sleepiness occurs in the mid-afternoon, between about 1 and 3 p.m.

Some studies also suggest that inadequate sleep may weaken the immune system or increase the risk of developing insulin resistance, a condition that predisposes people to diabetes.

But you may be getting away with less sleep at night because you’re older. The amount that people sleep at night drops an average of 30 minutes per decade, starting around the time you turn 40. People over 60 barely manage an average of five hours a night. The hitch is, they really need more. They sleep less because they have more difficulty staying asleep. They don’t sleep as deeply and are more easily disturbed by noise and light. Plus, they’re more likely to have health problems that interrupt sleep.

And, the older you get, the less accurate your internal clock (which governs the sleep-wake cycle) becomes. As your clock starts to drift forward, you start nodding off in the early evening and waking up before the sun does. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

A little late-afternoon or evening stroll in the great outdoors can help reset your body’s clock. Oddly enough, it’s not the exercise that does it. Simply being outdoors seems to be enough.

Wearing a sleep mask or even resorting to earplugs can help block out disturbances you could sleep through in younger days. And not drinking any liquids – especially anything with the stimulant caffeine – for an hour before bedtime can minimize expeditions to the bathroom in the wee hours.



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### WHAT'S HAPPENING...

#### *Finally Published*

After seven years of work over the last ten years, my new book, *The Ethics of Touch*, has just been published. Completing this book would not have been possible without collaborating with my co-author, Cherie Sohnen-Moe, and the help of many others who contributed their insights and suggestions. I think it is the best book I have ever written and hope it will make a major contribution to the hands-on health care field. Even before we published, a forward-thinking organization, Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals (ABMP), purchased 6,000 copies which they will send for free to several thousand of their oldest members and to the directors of every massage and body therapy school in the country.

#### *Video Project Finished*

My video program project on the knee is finally complete and about to go to market. It has taken a year of work to make this a reality. This set of programs will teach the assessment and treatment of the 23 most common knee injuries to interested therapists around the country.

### Complementary Medical Conference

I was invited by Harvard's Osher Institute to be one of the presenters at the Annual Medical Education Conference, Integrating Complementary Therapies into Clinical Practice: Cases and Evidence. Hundreds of interested physicians and other health care practitioners attend this conference in Boston each year. It was an honor, as well as a lot of work, to present at and participate in this conference.

### Harvard Clinic

Harvard's Osher Institute has also invited me to join the Curriculum Committee to help plan the training of a new clinical team which will focus on musculoskeletal pain and injury. The clinic, still in the early stages of development, will integrate traditional and complementary health care.

### Research Consortium

In an effort to help the massage and body therapy profession move forward, I and two colleagues recently brought together leaders in the field from across North America to create a research consortium. This group, still in the early stages of development, hopes to help the massage and bodywork field move into the twenty-first century by supporting massage research and the development of research programs in massage and bodywork schools.