

## MASSAGE

Hippocrates called medicine “the art of rubbing,” and research today shows that massage can indeed be therapeutic. Any type of massage may cause heart rate, blood pressure and stress hormones to decline, responses that have many documented positive effects on the body. “Moderate but not intense pressure most effectively stimulates the body’s pressure receptors. Those, in turn, send signals to the body to relax,” says developmental psychologist Tiffany Field, Ph.D., director of the University of Miami School of Medicine’s Touch Research Institute. And 20 minutes is all it takes to produce the healthy benefits.

### WHAT WE KNOW FOR SURE

**It relieves stress** Seems obvious, but science proves it. And since stress is linked to illnesses as diverse as depression and diabetes, reducing it is one of the healthiest things you can do, says Brent Bauer, M.D., director of the Complementary and Integrative Medicine program at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He and his colleagues recently reported that massage helped relieve anxiety, tension and pain in patients recovering from heart surgery. Previous studies in stressed-out nurses as well as breast-cancer patients, chronic headache sufferers, cancer patients undergoing radiation and athletes reached similar conclusions.

**It can relieve aches and pains** Researchers reviewed 13 studies on low-back pain in 2008 and concluded that massage may be beneficial, especially when combined with exercise and education about how to treat the condition. In addition, a study of more than 300 people with advanced cancer found that massage helped relieve pain and improve mood, and researchers from the Group Health Research

Institute in Seattle found that it may help relieve neck pain, at least in the short term. Massage also can minimize postexercise muscle soreness.

**It can speed weight gain in low-birth-weight babies** Dr. Field and her colleagues recently published a review of the scientific literature and found that underweight babies who receive 10- to 15-minute sessions of massage several times a day gain 47 percent more weight on average than those who don’t get massage. And Brazilian researchers reported that underweight infants who had been massaged showed significantly higher mental development scores at age 2 than other low-birth-weight babies.

### PROMISING NEW RESEARCH

Massage may help relieve labor pain, fibromyalgia symptoms and depression, says recent research, but more studies are needed to confirm the effects. Several studies are under way or have been recently completed, so more information should be available in the next year or so.

### IT WORKED FOR ME

*“I had ongoing jaw and neck pain from a car accident seven years ago. I tried physical therapy, rolling, you name it, but nothing helped that much. Then in October last year I began seeing a massage therapist. I can’t lie face-down because of the pain, so she had me lie on my side. I saw her once a week for six months, and I still go as often as I can. She massages me from the waist up but concentrates on my jaw and neck. Before I started seeing her, my daily pain level was a 5 to 7 on a scale of 1 to 10. Now it’s maybe a 3. I’ll always have some pain, but it’s so much more manageable now. The change in my life has been dramatic.”*  
**Paula Schenk, 45; Parker, Colorado**