Are massages actually good for you? An expert gives their view

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Many of us think of having a massage as the ultimate self-care treat; with 76% of Brits reporting that they book an appointment for their mental wellbeing – but are massages good for you?

You may be wondering when massage therapists will be resuming their services. But in the mean time, it's worth considering how a massage can benefit your body and mind.

Whether it's for a condition such as arthritis or just to de-stress after a long week, there's a reason a trip to the spa is so popular, but are massages actually good for us? Our expert, qualified osteopath, Anisha Joshi (osteoanisha.com) has the lowdown.

Is massage good for arthritis?

Massage can be very beneficial to arthritis sufferers, and is often recommended to those with the more common osteoarthritis (a degenerative condition caused by 'wear and tear') and rheumatoid arthritis (an auto-immune disease causing inflammation in the joints).

"Massage will warm the body through boosting circulation, in turn, easing arthritis pain which responds well to heat," says Anisha. "A soft tissue massage is best to improve mobilisation of the joints and reduce stiffness caused by arthritis."

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Does massage help back pain?

"Massage can be a great source of natural short-term pain relief for anyone not wanting to rely on pain killers, and that does not need a stronger, more invasive treatment such as ESI (epidural steroid injections)," says Anisha.

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"Lower back pain in particular – caused by muscle tightness – can be improved by massage though reducing tension in that area."

A common physiological response to massage is the release of the hormone Oxytocin, which reduces our perception of pain.

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Does massage help sciatica?

"I see a lot of patients for Sciatica – a debilitating chronic pain condition named after the sciatic nerve, which runs through your piriformis muscle in your buttock," says Anisha.

"If this muscle is tight due to overuse or injury then it can lead to an impingement of the nerve. An osteopath uses a combination of techniques and massage can help relax of the muscles and reduce the nerve impingement."

Does massage help weight loss?

"Due to the fact massage encourages lymphatic drainage and boosts metabolism, it is an option worth considering for those trying to lose weight," says Anisha. It's crucial however that you are eating healthily and exercising regularly in addition. If you are trying to lose weight, being in the right frame of mind is paramount. I consider massage to be as beneficial to the mind as it is to the body – and by releasing hormones like dopamine (the 'happy' hormone) you are boosting your mood and overall wellbeing, better setting you up to be successful in your weight loss journey.

What massage is best for knots / what are knots in muscles?

Knots can be found mostly anywhere muscular on the body – and can be caused by stress, dehydration and even poor eating habits. "They are small, firm bumps that are painful to press on," says Anisha.

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"Whilst some knots can go away on their own, often massage techniques like 'deep tissue' need to be used to loosen the muscle tension and reduce the pain."

Foam rollers are also are great way to help loosen knots on the body.

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What massage is best for tight shoulders?

There's a lot of truth to the saying 'carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders'.

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"We hold so much tension in our shoulders, which his often stress and anxiety manifesting itself as such. Posture can also be a factor," says Anisha. "The type of massage and general approach will be based on the cause of your shoulder pain. An osteopath can help you figure this out."

Massage, along with stretching techniques, will be used to help improve movement and reduce muscle tension.

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