

Massage Therapy Grows as Benefits are Validated



The perception of massage as something questionable has changed dramatically with the increase of well-trained, licensed and certified massage therapy professionals. And, public demand is driving the trend as the benefits of therapeutic massage are validated and become well known.

"There's a very clear and growing acceptance of massage therapy," said E. Houston LeBrun, president-elect of the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA). "A *New England Journal of Medicine* article reported in 1993 that a third of Americans are spending more than \$10 billion a year out of pocket on alternative therapies, and massage therapy

is one of the top three alternative therapies."

The AMTA notes that current research reflects a growth trend in massage therapy: people are having more massages, and it's becoming more mainstream, appealing to everyone from young adults to those who are more mature. People are capitalizing on the therapeutic benefits of massage and report having massages mostly for relaxation, to relieve aches and pains and to help reduce stress.

Evidence of the growth and acceptance of massage is plentiful.

- More insurance companies are covering massage therapy, from Oxford Health Plans on the East Coast, to Kaiser-Permanente, in California.
- Doctors are increasingly recognizing the benefits. Many refer patients to massage therapists, particularly to help them deal with pain, and to alleviate the effects of stress. A national survey conducted by the State University of New York at Syracuse found 54 percent of primary care physicians and family practitioners said they would encourage their patients to pursue massage therapy as a treatment. And, at least 38 of the 120 U.S. medical schools now offer courses on alternative medicine.
- The National Institutes of Health's Office of Alternative Medicine recently spent \$10 million to establish 10 centers in the United States to study alternative therapies, including massage. All are affiliated with major institutions, including Harvard Medical School and Stanford University.
- AMTA's membership of professional therapists is more than 28,000, a nearly four-fold increase in a decade.

"Professionalism in the field of massage therapy has been elevated greatly in the last 10 years," said Marjorie J. Albohm, MS, ATC, director of sports medicine and orthopedic research at the Center for Hip and Knee Surgery in Indianapolis. "In many ways, it is a new profession."

Massage therapy is particularly growing in several venues, including sports massage and massage in the workplace.

Many professional athletes — including basketball icon Michael Jordan — rely on massage to help them recover from injuries and muscle soreness, and more than 100 massage therapists provided massages to Olympic athletes, as part of the official medical services team, during the summer games in Atlanta in 1996.

Increasingly, companies are offering massage at work. Employees typically sign up for 15-minute mini-massages, and report feeling not only less stressed, but more alert.

"Employees constantly comment that massage helps them to concentrate and become more productive," LeBrun said. "And they're happier to work for their employer."

AMTA provides free informational brochures for consumers, and will help consumers or professionals locate qualified massage therapists in their area. Contact AMTA, 820 Davis St., Suite 100, Evanston, IL 60201-4444; phone (847) 864-0123; fax (847) 864-1178; or via the Web at www.amtamassage.org.