



OSTEOARTHRITIS

(also known as Degenerative Joint Disease)

Osteoarthritis (OA) is joint inflammation directly related to the “wear and tear” of the joint structures. Massage therapy can be a great way to ease the pain and stiffness of muscles and joints and the lack of restful sleep associated with OA, and many doctors recommend massage to their patients with arthritis.

Research has shown that massage can decrease stress hormones and depression, ease muscle pain and spasms, improve mobility, increase the body’s production of natural pain-killing endorphins, increase circulation, improve sleep and immune function.

Progression of OA:

- 1) Cartilage Damage from years of use or repetitive injury, progressively worsens.
- 2) Bony Adaptation. The bones cannot replace damages cartilage effectively. Instead of forming a new smooth cartilage surface, the bones are forced to adapt, usually by thickening at the condyles or forming spurs where they feel the most stress. These changes increase pain, stiffness and further limit movement.
- 3) Muscles React. A muscle that is in an area of constant pain and irritation will tighten, spasm and develop trigger points. This further compresses the affected joint, creating a vicious cycle (often referred to as myofascial pain syndrome). ** Massage therapy can help reduce these symptoms, may create a temporary reprieve from this pain cycle, and can improve your ability to continue with normal activities.
- 4) Atrophy. When the joint hurts too much, a person with OA may stop using it. The joint wastes away, muscles become weaker, synovial fluid (joint lubrication) dries up. May progress to the point where joint use becomes impossible.

Massage Therapy and OA:

- Find a massage therapist who is experienced and comfortable working with people with arthritis as some elements of massage may not be appropriate for you. Be aware that Wisconsin does not regulate or even require training of massage providers unless they have chosen to participate in a voluntary certification program. We highly recommend selecting a Wisconsin Certified Massage Therapist (WCMT).
- There are many forms of massage. Discuss your session goals with your therapist to help you decide together the most beneficial techniques for your massage. A massage focused on relaxation may vary significantly from a massage focused on more clinical benefits such as reducing swelling or improving joint range of motion.
- We do not recommend massage therapy directly on affected joints when your OA is in an acute stage (hot, red, painful and swollen). Massage can be most beneficial for Chronic OA.
- Be sure to discuss your current health status with your therapist before every session and provide feedback during the session to let him or her know if anything feels uncomfortable. Be aware that even when practiced by the most experienced professional massage therapist cannot reverse the causes of osteoarthritis.

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