

Top 10 Benefits of Massage Therapy for Seniors

- By Anthony Lima at Judson Services, assisted & independent living care

Increases blood flow to limbs – “Increasing circulation is the most important benefit for seniors,” says Lima, “Good circulation can become increasingly difficult as we age, and massage therapy really helps the flow of the blood into the limbs.”

Improves balance and gait – Falling is consistently listed as one of the top concerns for seniors, as our bones tend to become more infirm as we get older. Due to massage’s ability to increase blood flow to the limbs, it helps to improve proprioception, or the sense of relative position of body parts, thus improving our balance and reducing our chances of falling.

Softens hard muscles and tissues – As we age, we generally become less active and so our muscles harden and get tighter. Massage helps to soften muscles and tissues by increasing blood flow to the areas and ultimately reducing overall muscle tension.

Produces feelings of caring and comfort – Some people enjoy massage because it can produce feelings of caring and connection. According to Lima, “Many seniors are touch-deprived due to the loss of a spouse or partner. The touch of massage really helps them to relax.”

Stimulates the nervous system – “Massage therapy releases endorphins, hormones and neurotransmitters that are beneficial for the functioning of the nervous system,” says Lima. Research has continually supported that claim, showing how therapeutic massage helps produce hormones that have enormous benefits on the body, including serotonin and dopamine (the happy hormone).

Eases stroke recovery – It used to be that bed rest was prescribed for up to 48 hours after a stroke, for fear of triggering another one. But that stance has flipped poles and now, following a stroke, seniors are advised to get up and moving again. A major aid to this is massage therapy because it stimulates affected areas, focusing on anything that might be paralyzed.

Increase flexibility – As our aging muscles tighten due to inactivity, it’s important to help them relax. Massage therapy softens up tight muscles and joints, enabling a wider range of motion in the activities of daily living.

Improves sleep – The relaxation benefit of massage extends well beyond the massage table. Lima has seen cases where therapeutic massage has helped some of his patients with dementia sleep through the night when they otherwise wouldn't.

Immune support – “In my experience, people who get massages are sick far less than people who don't,” says Lima. “Massage releases a lot of toxins and greatly supports the functioning of the immune system.”

Relieves arthritic pain – “Massage isn't ever going to cure arthritis,” says Lima, “but it helps to relieve the burning conditions.” Focusing on increased blood flow to the joints and warming affected areas has proven benefits in pain relief for those suffering from arthritis.