



PEDIATRIC MASSAGE THERAPY

Pediatric massage is a complementary and alternative treatment that uses massage therapy, or "the manual manipulation of soft tissue intended to promote health and well-being" for children and adolescents. The goal is to aide in reducing pain, anxiety, loneliness and fear when children are hospitalized or diagnosed with a debilitating medical condition. Pediatric massage takes into consideration each child's individual physical development, cognitive development and heath care needs. From infants to adolescents, children benefit tremendously from receiving Massage Therapy. An impressive amount of research has been conducted on the effects of Massage Therapy for children with various conditions. The Touch Research Institute in Miami, FL has shown Massage Therapy benefits many pediatric conditions.

Pediatric Conditions

Anorexia ~


Massage Therapy reduced anxiety, depressed mood and salivary cortisol, (stress hormone) levels and body dissatisfaction.

Asthma ~

This study showed positive effects of parents massaging their asthmatic children including increased peak air flow, improved pulmonary functions, less anxiety, and reduced stress hormone (cortisol) in the children. Parental anxiety also decreased.

ADHD ~

Adolescents with ADHD rated themselves as happier and were observed to fidget less after massage sessions. Also, teachers rated adolescents receiving massage as less hyperactive and as spending more time on-task.



Children with ADHD showed more on-task behavior in the classroom and were rated as less hyperactive by their teachers following one month of twice weekly massages.

Autism ~

Children in the massage group exhibited less stereotypic behavior and showed more on-task and social relatedness behavior during play observations at school, and they experienced fewer sleep problems at home.

Back Pain ~

Massage lessened lower back pain, depression and anxiety, and improved sleep. The massage therapy group also showed improved range of motion and their serotonin and dopamine levels were higher.

Behavior Problems ~

Preschool children with behavior problems who received massage showed more on-task behavior, and less solitary play.

Bulimia ~

Bulimic adolescent girls received massage therapy 2 times a week for 5 weeks. Effects included an improved body image, decreased depression and anxiety symptoms, decreased cortisol levels and increased dopamine and serotonin levels.

Burns ~


Massage Therapy given prior to dressing young children's severe body burns decreased stress behaviors. Nurses also reported greater ease in completing the dressing change procedure for the children in the massage group.

Cerebral Palsy ~

Massage therapy helped children with CP reduce spasticity, gain more muscle flexibility, and motor function and have more positive social interaction.

Cocaine Exposed Newborns ~

Massaged newborns had fewer postnatal complications and showed increased weight gain, better performance on the Brazelton Neonatal Behavior Assessment Scale, and less stress behaviors following 10 days of massage.



Cystic Fibrosis ~ Children receiving daily bedtime massages from their parents reported being less anxious, and their mood and peak air flow readings improved.

Dermatitis ~

Children's affect and activity levels improved as did all measures of skin condition including less redness, lichenification, excoriation, and pruritis after massage therapy. Parents' anxiety levels also decreased.

Diabetes ~

Following one month of parents massaging their children with diabetes, the children's glucose levels decreased to the normal range and their dietary compliance increased. Both parents' and children's anxiety and depression levels decreased.

Down syndrome ~

Infants with Down syndrome improved in muscle tone and in performance on motor tasks following massage therapy.

HIV Exposed Newborns ~

Increased weight gain and improved performance on the Brazelton Newborn Scale were experienced by the massaged newborns.

Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis ~

Positive effects of parents massaging their arthritis children included less pain (particularly at night), and less morning stiffness as assessed by the Parent, Child and Physician's Assessment as well as lower anxiety and cortisol levels.

Leukemia ~

Twenty children with leukemia were provided with daily massages by their parents and were compared to a standard treatment control group. Following one month of massage therapy, depressed mood decreased in the children's parents, and children's white blood cell and neutrophil counts increased.

Multiple Sclerosis ~

Massage therapy decreased anxiety and depressed mood, and improved hand strength, self-esteem, body image, and social functioning.

Preterm Infants & Newborns ~

Preterm infants gained more weight following as few as 5 days of massage therapy.

Preterm infants gained **47%** more weight, became more socially responsive, and were discharged 6 days earlier. The underlying biological mechanism for weight gain in the massaged preterm newborns may be increase in vagal tone and, in turn, and increase in insulin (food absorption hormone).

Psychiatric Patients ~

With 30-minute massages these children/adolescents had better sleep patterns, lower depression and anxiety and lower stress hormone levels (cortisol and norepinephrine).

