# How Massage Therapy Can Help Treat MS

by AMY MANLEY

## Benefits of Massage for MS

In addition to traditional approaches to MS treatment, many patients have begun using massage therapy as an alternative form of treatment. By learning more about the benefits of massages for MS, you can determine if this unique approach is right for you. Here's what to know about massage therapy for MS patients.

### Treating Pain Naturally

When your sensory nerves are affected by MS, they send pain signals to the brain at various levels. According to experts, around 80% of patients with MS will have their sensory nerves disturbed. These nerves are not only responsible for sending pain signals to the brain, but they also regulate the body’s core temperature. When they are damaged by MS, circulation is disrupted in the body, which can be risky.

Massages offer natural pain relief for patients with MS because they help improve circulation, allowing the blood to move freely throughout the body. When circulation is improved, the sensory nerves can heal because the excess pressure is removed. While it can take a few sessions for results to show, many patients with MS experience a huge reduction in their sensory nerve pain.

Additionally, your muscles may be spastic, or may be atrophying (wasting away), and bringing more circulation to those muscles can help.

### Getting Started

According to experts, patients with MS can get massages regularly without having any adverse effect. As long as you’re going to a skilled and licensed massage therapist, you don’t have to worry about suffering from an injury when having a massage. Thousands of patients all over the world get massages to help treat their MS, all while reducing stress and improving flexibility.

When you’re looking for a massage therapist to help treat your MS symptoms, you’ll be presented with two different choices. The first choice is a regular licensed massage therapist. This type of massage is offered in a massage parlor, and consists of gentle strokes that soothe. The second choice you’ll have is a medical grade massage. This type of massage is applied in firm strokes, and is aimed toward offering relief for MS, along with various health problems like muscle strains.

### Types of Massage to Consider

- **Raindrop therapy massage –** In this type of massage, the massage therapist uses essential oils and starts by putting them on the bottom of your feet. Some of the essential oils used include basil, marjoram, thyme, oregano, peppermint, wintergreen, cypress and one called Aroma Siez. A few drops of one to three essential oils are placed onto the soles and then onto your spine or back. They may be sprinkled on,

hence the name "raindrop therapy," and then massaged into the skin with massage oils. These essential oils have multiple medicinal properties. Some are anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, sedative, mentally stimulative, relaxant — the list could goes on! The aromas of these essential oils work on you on multiple levels. You'll feel positive psychological benefits (happier, calmer, content) as well as feel the physical effects as your muscles and joints feel much better. Pets love to sniff you after one of these massages.

- **Swedish massage –** This is a traditional massage. It involves long strokes, kneading, rolling, friction and tapping to improve the muscle tone, reduce tension and improve circulation in your body. It's a very relaxing type of massage.
- **Reflexology foot massage –** In this type of massage, specific reflexology points are pressed on the bottom of the foot. Each point has sensory neurons that may lead to other parts of the body. Thus, by pressing on foot points, you can start to improve the health of your entire body.

**Types of Massage to Avoid**

Everyone with MS can benefit greatly once they start getting regular massages. However, there are some types of massage that you may want to stay away from.

- **Hot stone massage –** A hot stone massage is not a good idea. Due to the disturbance in your nerve sensations, you may not feel if the stones are too hot and could suffer burns.
- **Deep tissue massage –** In a deep tissue massage the massage therapist is on the hunt for painful spots, and once one is located, it will be pressed and you will temporarily have greater levels of pain.
- **Rolfing/structural integration –** This is the manipulation of the tissues for the purpose of releasing psychological traumas that are held in the tissues after a bad incident. With MS you don't have normal reflexes so your response may not be what is normally expected. Plus, afterward you'll likely feel like you've been beat up.