

Injury, Rehabilitation & Recovery

FACT SHEET 3



About this fact sheet

Massage therapists, remedial massage therapists and myotherapists (professional qualified therapists) often fill the gap when patients seek alternatives to medications and other therapies because they feel that remedial massage therapy and myotherapy provides a level of relief that is appropriate to their needs.

While a proportion of remedial massage therapy and myotherapy treatments are initiated by patients self-directing their care, many appointments are initiated through a referral from a registered medical practitioner such as a GP, or an allied health practitioner.

Remedial massage therapy and myotherapy is not a cure for disease, injury or chronic condition. However, they can provide relief from pain and stress, improve mobility and help rehabilitation and recovery. Patients should always seek medical advice first when new conditions or pain arises.

The following will assist you in understanding what a professional qualified therapist is, and how the appropriate training, experience and skills can help in maintaining or restoring a level of health and wellbeing.

Remedial massage therapy and myotherapy in injury recovery

Effective management of acute pain caused by injury is vital in preventing the transition to a costly chronic state, which has negative outcomes for patients, the healthcare systems, employment and the community.

Remedial massage therapy and myotherapy is recognised in 'real life experience' for its positive role in rehabilitation and recovery. Pain relief, and the positive psychological/physiological effects of touch and human interaction with low risk make these therapies an attractive and accessible response.^{1,2}

Anecdotally, remedial massage therapy and myotherapy is used extensively in elite sports, including Australia's Olympic Team,³ and within Australian state-funded work accident, and

motor vehicle accident rehabilitation schemes such as the NSW SIRA.⁴

A survey of members by Massage & Myotherapy Australia⁵ found that a large majority of therapists provided services in the areas of occupational injuries (39%), motor accident and rehabilitation (33%), sports injury management and rehabilitation (76%). This included reduced strength and fitness, muscular strain and repetitive strain, tendonitis/tendinopathy, and muscular tears.

This is not surprising considering that over 87% of Australians aged 15 or over participated in a sport or physical activity in the last 12 months.⁶

Remedial massage therapy and myotherapy is most effective when administered as part of a multidisciplinary approach

Remedial massage therapy and myotherapy is used extensively in sports and rehabilitation as a non-pharmaceutical pain relief, and to assist in mobility and injury recovery.

As a part of a multidisciplinary approach to patient-centred care, these interventions or therapies can help to achieve clinically meaningful improvements that include helping patients move more freely, reducing pain and improving their emotional disposition.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ([AIHW](#)) 2018 cites the Australian [Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#) recommending that people aged 18 to 64 exercise for at least 150 minutes over 5 sessions per week; and over 65 years, at least 30 minutes per day. While physical exercise is known to improve mental and physical health, the close associations between limitations in physical functional and psychological distress highlight special needs among individuals who experience these daily functional limitations.⁷

Research indicates that remedial massage therapy and myotherapy can provide a cost-effective bridge to recovery

plans involving physical exercise. A 2016⁸ meta-analysis of Randomised Controlled Trials concluded that, based on the evidence, massage therapy, compared to no treatment, should be strongly recommended as a pain management option.

A US econometric analysis⁹ examined how the inclusion of massage therapy services, as part of an integrative care approach, can help lower costs for certain conditions and types of treatments. The 2014 study found that of the 19 outpatient treatments studied, massage was associated with lower overall treatment costs in 16 of these treatments.

Another study¹⁰ found that patients who had a general practitioner with additional complementary and alternative medicine training had lower health care costs and mortality rates than those who did not. Reduced costs come from fewer hospital stays and fewer prescription drugs.

The Canadian Institute of Work and Health concluded that massage was most effective for lower back pain when combined with education and exercise, and when administered by a licensed therapist.¹¹

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Limitations in medical research

Remedial massage therapy and myotherapy is never provided in a controlled clinical environment required by a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT). Hence, achieving high quality research has proved challenging for massage therapy researchers.

For example, of the 3,678 RCT articles reviewed in a 2016¹² study, 67 met the systematic review's inclusion criteria. Of the 980 studies gathered in the 2015¹³ review of natural therapies, Australia's Chief Medical Officer found that only 99 studies conformed to the prescribed scope and limitations, and 17 were regarded as high quality.

Consequently, researchers have developed 'real world' research methodologies to account for the challenges this poses to achieving conclusive results, and some of these studies are furthering our understanding of the efficacy of remedial massage therapy and myotherapy in injury recovery or prevention.

In sports, evidence has long supported the use of remedial massage therapy and myotherapy to reduce the effects of DOMs (Delayed onset muscle soreness) and improve flexibility.¹⁴

The use of standardised massage modalities can have a positive effect on recovery

In 2021,¹⁵ researchers added another layer of understanding and recorded biological changes in tissues following regular massage. Using a robotic device equipped with real-time force control and compatible with ultrasound imaging for tissue strain analysis, they investigated the hypothesis that specific mechanical loading improves tissue repair by modulating inflammatory responses that regulate skeletal muscle regeneration. They found that cyclic compressive loading within a specific range of forces substantially improves functional recovery of severely injured muscles in mice. This improvement is attributable in part to rapid clearance of neutrophil populations and neutrophil-mediated factors, which otherwise may impede myogenesis (the formation of skeletal muscular tissue).

Other recent studies have shown that standardised massages provided by therapists are capable of reliably inducing physiological and psychological states of relaxation.

In 2020,¹⁶ researchers successfully established two protocols focused on psychophysiological relaxation induced through

massage. They measured significant higher effects because of the two nerve and shoulder protocols, compared to the resting control group. Measured effects included significantly improved heart rate variability and subjective relaxation.

During 2017,¹⁷ researchers investigated the efficacy of remedial massage therapy and myotherapy and other non-pharmacological treatments for chronic low back pain in 'real world' primary healthcare. Participants completed questionnaires regarding their reported or perceived health, pain severity, function ability, and pain-related medications. At 12 and 24 weeks of treatments, participants reported measured improvement across all areas. Of those with clinically improved disability at 12 weeks, 75% were still clinically improved at 24 weeks. Those with physical disability and related emotional and mental health symptoms showed clinically meaningful improvement at 12 weeks, and 46.1% and 30.3% at 24 weeks. For bodily pain, 49.4% were clinically improved at 12 weeks and 40% at 24 weeks. Adults older than 49 years had better pain and disability outcomes than younger adults.

More information:

- » [Australian Massage Directory](#) - find a professional qualified local therapist
- » [Massage & Myotherapy Australia](#) website - consumer section
- » [Australian Government Health Directory](#) - free health advice
- » [US Department of Health and Services](#) - massage therapy - what you need to know.



Endnotes

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