

Help in Maintaining Positive Mental Health

FACT SHEET 8



About this fact sheet

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

The following provides information to General Practitioners and other registered health professionals when discussing mental health issues associated with chronic pain and illness, and substance abuse with patients.

As with all health-related therapies, no two people respond in the same way and no two therapists can provide a massage in the same way. Massage therapy or myotherapy may or may not be right for a patient. Finding a professional, qualified therapist that you have confidence in, because they have the appropriate training, experience and skills needed, will assist in developing multidisciplinary management plans.

Mental health issues in Australia

One in five people will experience mental ill health in any year¹ and one in eight visits to a General Practitioner are related to mental health.² Many people suffer preventable physical and mental distress, relationship breakdown, stigma and loss of life satisfaction and opportunities:

- » 14.4% had a 12-month Anxiety Disorder (includes Panic disorder (2.6%)
- » Agoraphobia (2.8%), Social Phobia (4.7%)
- » Generalised Anxiety Disorder (2.7%)
- » Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (1.9%) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (6.4%)
- » 6.2% had a 12-month Affective Disorder (which includes a Depressive Episode (4.1%) ranging from severe, moderate, and mild episodes)
- » Dysthymia (1.3%) and Bipolar Affective Disorder (1.8%), and
- » 5.1% had a 12-month Substance Use Disorder (which includes Alcohol Harmful Use (2.9%), Alcohol Dependence (1.4%) and Drug Use Disorders (including harmful use and dependence) (1.4%).

Considering massage in mental health management plans

The HILDA survey, as outlined in the Productivity Commission Report,³ *Measuring health-related quality of life*, combines peoples' answers to physical and mental health-related questions. The responses provide a guide to understand more fully the impact of mental health issues on the quality of patients' lives.

Additionally, the US Pain Collaborative Report,⁴ driven by survey data on patient awareness and satisfaction with current chronic pain assessment instruments, provides patient-informed recommendations that the researcher suggest should be taken upurgently by physicians, patients and advocacy organisations to improve the lives of people living with chronic pain.

Figure 1 below (Figure 5 of the US Report) underscores the need for more comprehensive chronic pain assessment methods to reflect the impact of chronic pain on daily life and its subsequent effects on mental health.

Figure 5: Life aspects health care providers routinely ask chronic pain patients, compared to the frequency with which patients would like to be asked (highest to lowest differential, n = 1,527).

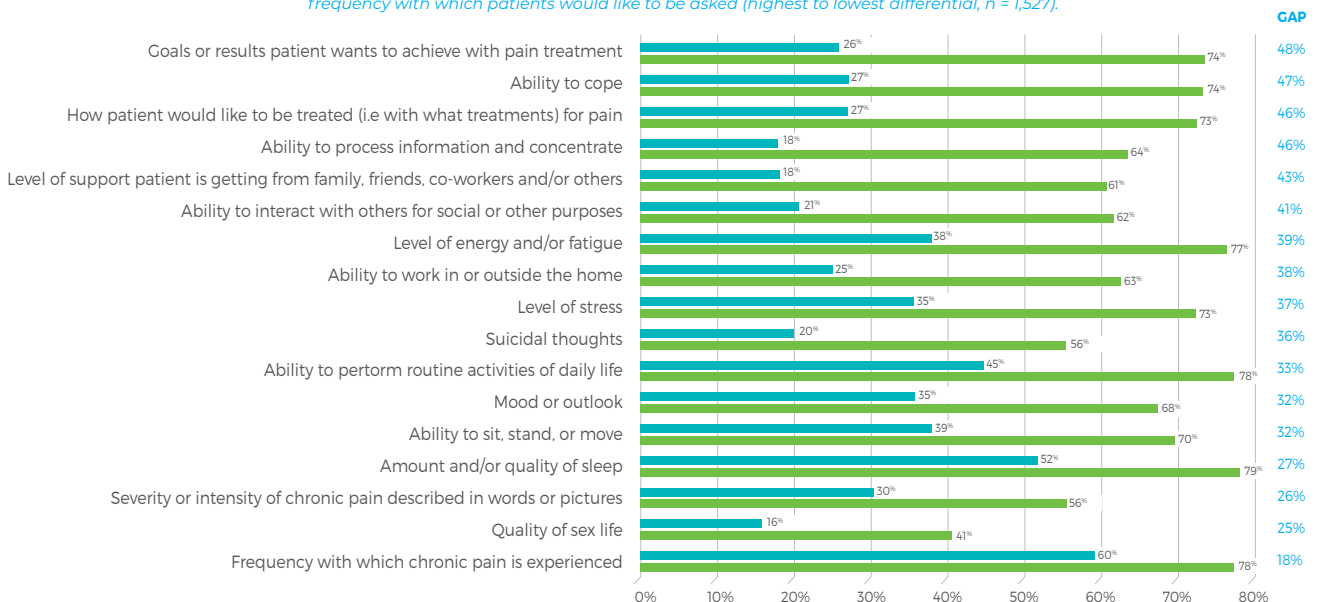


Figure 1: Life Aspect Assessment US Collaborative Pain Report

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The quality-of-life assessments listed in the Hilda Survey and the US Collaborative Pain Report are similar. They both suggest that broader criteria of assessment and treatment options can have a positive effect on understanding the complex relationship between physical health and improving mental health.

While massage and myotherapy are not cures for mental illness, the role of these therapies in managing pain and stress across all population groups means that they already play an important role in maintaining positive mental health and improving the quality of people's daily lives.

Massage in managing stress, depression, and anxiety

People with mental illness are 18–36 per cent more likely to have musculoskeletal problems.⁴

Examination of the relationship between mental health and physical illness reveals that physical therapies, including manual manipulation and exercise, shows that massage can have a positive effect on emotional well-being, relaxation, vitality, and quality of sleep. For example:

- » A 2016 meta-analysis found that massage therapy is effective for treating pain compared to no treatment [standardised mean difference (SMD) = -0.20] and active (SMD = -0.55) comparators. Compared to active comparators, massage therapy was also found to be beneficial for treating fatigue (SMD = -1.06) and anxiety (SMD = -1.24).⁵ For older people, massage can also enhance positive well-being and reduce stress perception among older adults.⁶
- » A 2010 meta-analysis concluded that massage therapy is significantly associated with alleviating depressive symptoms.⁷
- » A 2006 study suggested that massage therapy is a beneficial tool for the health of nurses as it may reduce psychological stress levels.⁸

Given the relationship between physical health and mental health,^{9,10} improving the quality of people's daily lives through massage therapy can have profound effects on maintaining positive health and well-being.¹¹

Improvements in a patient's ability to walk¹² with less pain, drive,¹³ engage in social activities,¹⁴ reduce stress¹⁵ at work, improve mobility¹⁶ and maintain social ties for older people or people with chronic disease such as diabetes,¹⁷ are significant

for patients limited by chronic or acute pain and/or prone to mental health issues.

Easing the debilitating symptoms of cancer,^{18,19} or improving sleep²⁰ after cardiac surgery in order to achieve a more positive disposition and normal functions are profound improvements for seriously ill patients.

The *Australian Association of Massage Therapists: Practitioner Survey* (now trading as Massage & Myotherapy Australia), Preliminary Report II, 15 January 2013, shows that the kinds of services that therapists provide complement the needs of lower level mental patients and related physical conditions.

Table 1 below presents the 'recorded reason for applying massage therapy,' varying from four (4) sessions for headaches and migraines, to ten (10) sessions for diabetes effects management.

Complaint or condition	Number of sessions	
	Average	Median
Diabetes Effects Management	10	6
Addictions Rehabilitation Support	10	6
Cancer Treatment Issues	9	5
Other Chronic Conditions	9	5
Health and Wellness	9	5
Motor Vehicle Accident and Rehabilitation	8	6
Psychological Distress	8	6
Joint Pain and Stiffness, including Arthritis	8	5
Back Pain and/or Other Back Problems	6	4
Repetitive Strain Injury Syndromes	6	5
Neck/Shoulder Pain	5	4
Other Acute Injury or Pain Conditions	5	4
Sports Injury Management and Rehabilitation	4	4
Headaches or Migraines	4	3

Table 1: Massage consultations in relation to condition treated

Hence, integrating physical therapies with mental health therapies and medical treatments would provide a deeper level of support alongside a greater choice of response strategies to low level mental health issues. This of course will also assist in preventing progression to higher level mental health issues.

More information

Through a simple Google search you can find more information from the following reliable sources:

- » [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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