

# Women & Musculoskeletal Disease

## FACT SHEET 1

### 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.

### Burden of musculoskeletal disease in Australian women

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2020<sup>1</sup> the total burden of musculoskeletal conditions was higher among women compared with men and generally increased with age to be highest among people aged 75 years and over. The AIHW reported that females experience a higher proportion of:

- » osteoarthritis at a rate 1.8 times higher for females compared with males
- » rheumatoid arthritis at a rate 1.6 times as high for females compared with males, and
- » osteoporosis was higher among women compared with men 5.5% and 1.1%, respectively.

Not surprisingly, women access massage services at a ratio of 2:1 to men (AAMT Practitioners Survey 2023<sup>2</sup>).

### Why women use remedial massage therapy and myotherapy

A significant Australian longitudinal study involving 1,800 women aged 56 to 61 years examined the association between the women's consultations with a massage therapist and their health-related quality of life which found **over 50% of women aged 56 to 61 visited a massage therapist in the previous 12 months** (Frawley J et al. 2015<sup>3</sup>). Researchers also found:

- » women who had consulted with a massage therapist five or more times had a significantly lower score on the bodily pain domain, compared with women who did not consult a massage therapist
- » women with lower quality of life scores in terms of bodily pain and/or emotional health were more likely to consult a massage therapist than those with higher scores
- » emotional disposition was significantly lower for those who consulted a massage therapist once or twice compared with those who did not consult a massage therapist.

### Evidenced-based therapies

Remedial massage therapy and myotherapy are not cures for musculoskeletal disease, but numerous studies attest to its effectiveness in relieving the symptoms of pain, reduced motion or function and associated anxiety.

- » Massage and manual therapy is shown to lead to improvements in pain and function in patients with knee osteoarthritis (Bowen Zhu, He Ba et al. 2024<sup>4</sup>).
- » Massage using [Swedish] modalities may positively affect pain relief and function improvement in patients with knee Osteoarthritis (Sabet F et al. 2021<sup>5</sup>).
- » Standardised massage protocols reliably induced physiological and psychological states of relaxation (Meier M 2020<sup>6</sup>).
- » The stronger impact of massage therapy on depressive mood, stress/tension, emotion, sleep disorders, and hopelessness was particularly impressive (Arnold M M et al. 2020<sup>7</sup>).
- » At 8 weeks, massage significantly improved WOMAC Global scores compared to light-touch and additional improvements of massage improved pain, stiffness and physical function compared to light touch and usual care (Perlman, A, Fogerite, SG, Glass, O et al. 2018<sup>8</sup>).
- » Stretching exercises and massage applied to the Combined Sternocleidomastoid muscle, together with conventional physiotherapy, can reduce pain and disability, increase range of motion and endurance in individuals with chronic neck pain (Büyükturan B et al. 2021<sup>9</sup>).
- » Results provide a meaningful signal of massage effect for primary care patients with chronic low back pain and call for further research in practice settings using pragmatic designs with control groups (Elder W G et al. 2017<sup>10</sup>).
- » Based on the evidence, massage therapy, compared to no treatment, should be strongly recommended as a pain management option (Crawford C et al. 2016<sup>11</sup>).
- » Study findings suggest that a combination of manual therapy and exercise is more effective than usual care on disability, pain intensity and global perceived recovery (Domingues L, Pimentel-Santos FM, Cruz EB, et al. 2019<sup>12</sup>).

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### Endnotes

1. [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020](#), Burden of Disease in Australia, Chronic musculoskeletal conditions.
2. Massage & Myotherapy 2023 Practitioners Survey, [Massage & Myotherapy Australia](#).
3. Frawley J et al., [Is there an association between women's consultations with a massage therapist and health-related quality of life? Analyses of 1800 women aged 56-61 years](#), 2015.
4. Bowen Zhu, He Ba et al, Shuguang Hospital, Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Shanghai, China, Zhu et al. [Systematic Reviews \(2024\) 13:91](#), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-024-02467-7>
5. Sabet F, Ebrahimipour E, Fariborz Mohammadipour, Daneshjoo A, Jafarnejadgero A, [Effects of Swedish massage on gait spatiotemporal parameters in adult women with medial knee osteoarthritis: A randomized controlled trial 2021](#)
6. Meier, M, Unternaehrer, E, Dimitroff, S J et al. [Standardized massage interventions as protocols for the induction of psychophysiological relaxation in the laboratory: a block randomized, controlled trial](#), Sci Rep 10, 14774 (2020).
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8. Perlman, A., Fogerite, S.G., Glass, O. et al. [Efficacy and Safety of Massage for Osteoarthritis of the Knee: a Randomized Clinical Trial](#), J GEN INTERN MED 34, 379-386 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-018-4763-5>
9. Büyükturan B, Şaş, Kararti C, Büyükturan O [The Effects of Combined Sternocleidomastoid Muscle Stretching and Massage on Pain, Disability, Endurance, Kinesiophobia, and Range of Motion in Individuals with Chronic Neck Pain: A randomized, single-blind study](#), [Musculoskeletal Science Practice](#), Volume 55, 1024172021
10. William G Elder, PhD; Niki Munk, PhD, LMT; Margaret M Love, PhD; Geza G. Bruckner, PhD; Kathryn E Stewart, BS, LMT; Kevin Pearce, MD, [Real-World Massage Therapy Produces Meaningful Effectiveness Signal for Primary Care Patients with Chronic Low Back Pain: Results of a Repeated Measures Cohort Study](#), MPH, Pain Medicine, Volume 18, Issue 7, July 2017, pp. 1394-1405.
11. Crawford C, Boyd C, Paat C F, Price A, Xenakis L, Yang E, Zhang W, and the Evidence for Massage Therapy (EMT) Working Group. [The Impact of Massage Therapy on Function in Pain Populations—A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials: Part I, Patients Experiencing Pain in the General Population](#).
12. Domingues L, Pimentel-Santos FM, Cruz EB, et al. [Is a combined programme of manual therapy and exercise more effective than usual care in patients with non-specific chronic neck pain? A randomized controlled trial](#), Clinical Rehabilitation. 2019;33(12):1908-1918. doi:10.1177/0269215519876675

