

[IMAGE]

The Right Dose of Massage

A recent study published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* investigates the mechanisms of repeated massage and its effects on immune and endocrine response. The assumption might be, if one massage per week is good, then two massages must be even better. However, the results of this study don't quite back this theory.

Previous research has suggested that massage may reduce pain, stress, depression, anxiety and cortisol levels and enhance certain immune function parameters. The largely unanswered question is how exactly massage produces these outcomes. The study authors compared once and twice-weekly Swedish massage to two equivalent doses of light touch.

Forty five participants were randomized to one of four intervention groups: five weeks of Swedish massage once or twice-weekly, or controlled light touch once or twice-weekly. Therapy sessions of 45 minutes were performed by licensed massage therapists using a standardized, specified protocol with non-aromatic oils. The light touch intervention followed the same protocol as Swedish massage except the therapist used light touch with the back of the hand.

massage - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark According to a study summary from the Massage Therapy Foundation, the overall results can be summed up as follows: "once-weekly massage demonstrated patterns of change in circulating lymphocyte markers and cytokines similar to what was observed after a single massage session. Once-weekly massage increased immune changes that were identified after a single session of massage, but had minimal effect on neuroendocrine function. By contrast, the twice-weekly massage increased neuroendocrine changes with little effect on the immune markers studied." The authors noted the time difference between massages (7-8 days for once weekly and 3-4 days for twice weekly) indicating this might have something to do with the observed endocrine differences. So, not only could it be dosage, but the time in between sessions could have vary effects as well.

Another key study finding was that even light touch, involving systematic, gentle and comprehensive stroking of an individual for 45 minutes does have an impact on biologic activity. These study findings provide further justification that repeated massage can promote sustained cumulative effects but that different dosages promote different biologic changes. As more and more research becomes available about

what types of massage, how much and how often it should be received and the positive biologic changes it can make, this information can provide health care professionals with a drug-free option to help people deal with a variety of chronic pain and other health issues.

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