

Helping Children Find Focus

Massage Calms ADHD Kids

Cathy Ulrich

Imagine lying on a massage table. As your massage therapist sets to work, you feel your body relax. Your muscles soften, your nervous system calms. Now, imagine how you feel when the massage is over--relaxed, alert, calm, and content.

Anyone who has gotten a massage understands the many benefits that it offers. Massage is usually reserved for adults--or sometimes infants--but what about massage for kids and adolescents? If massage helps calm the body and improve alertness, how might it help kids with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)? Can children and teenagers who can't sit still benefit from massage?

the rate of diagnosis for girls has been rising as well, and girls who are diagnosed have the same level of impairment as boys.

Kids with ADHD show difficulty holding attention and display impulsive behaviors and overactivity levels beyond what might be expected for their age group. They typically show poorer academic performance, have difficulty in social settings, and can't adapt as well emotionally as kids without ADHD. Studies show that a diagnosis of ADHD puts kids at higher risk for delinquent behaviors and substance abuse. Other diagnoses such as learning disabilities, mood disorders, and anxiety disorders are often seen in the same children.



Many kids with ADHD who receive massage say they are happier and more confident.

Understanding ADHD

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, is rapidly rising as the most common psychiatric diagnostic label for children. Anywhere from 3-7 percent of all school-age children and adolescents may have it, and it is one of the primary causes of behavioral problems in general pediatric settings. Nine boys are diagnosed with ADHD for every girl, but

Medical Treatments

Now a household name, the drug Ritalin is the most common medication prescribed for children diagnosed with ADHD. In fact, it's the most common drug prescribed for any childhood disorder. It's been estimated that more

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Take time to stop and smell the roses, it may actually boost your mood!

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Call for an appointment
Ask about current specials!

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than five million school-age children take Ritalin annually.

Known to stimulate areas of the brain associated with attention, arousal, and inhibition, Ritalin seems to help improve ADHD symptoms in about 75 percent of cases, but its effects last only as long as it's taken, and it does produce side-effects. Nervousness, headaches, sleeplessness, and rapid heart rate are sometimes seen with its use, and overdose can produce severe effects such as agitation, hallucinations, high blood pressure, seizures, heart arrhythmias, and psychosis. In addition, studies are only now being conducted on long-term effects.

Ritalin, as well as other psychostimulant drugs, can be effective in improving attention span and modifying behaviors associated with ADHD, but kids need to be monitored carefully for side effects and appropriate dosage.

Massage for ADHD

Two recent studies conducted by the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami reported that regular massage therapy can be an effective treatment for kids with ADHD. One study found adolescent boys who received ten 15-minute daily massages were observed by their teachers to be more focused in their schoolwork, and they fidgeted less. In addition, the children rated themselves as happier than those who participated in a relaxation therapy program.

Another study involved kids aged 7-18, 20 percent of whom were girls. Each subject received a 20-minute massage twice a week. They showed immediate improvement in their moods and longer-term behavioral improvement in the classroom. They also reported feeling happier and their teachers found them to be more attentive.

In adult studies, massage has been shown to reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol, helping to mitigate the active fight-or-flight response. Massage also helps improve math computation performance and raises alertness levels, as measured on electroencephalograms (EEGs). Finally, massage decreases depression and increases mental focus. The same effects are seen in children and teenagers with ADHD.

The Details

Incorporating professional massage into your child's routine may help him to develop an age-appropriate ability to focus, a calmer disposition, and even increased confidence. Studies report that two 20-minute massages a week are enough to show significant improvement in ADHD children. Because these kids have trouble staying still for prolonged periods, they better tolerate shorter, more frequent massages.

For massage on children with ADHD, a practitioner generally uses simple, moderate-pressure strokes to the child's head/neck, arms, torso, legs, and back. Dividing time between these areas--say four minutes each--will address the full body and is enough to get the desired effect. Most kids do fine fully clothed.

A comfortable bed, chair, or table in a quiet room is best. For parents seeking

skilled bodywork for their kids, chair massage is a great choice, done with the child fully clothed and for about 20-30 minutes at a time.

In addition, supplementing with home massages between professional sessions can also be useful. Talk to your massage therapist about private massage lessons for you. She can teach you simple, effective techniques to use on your child when frequent visits to the massage therapist may not be practical.

By adding massage to your child's routine, you're giving him much needed physical contact and helping to calm his nervous system, which will pay dividends in his ability to do school work, interact with peers and teachers, and be happier in general. And if you're massaging your child yourself, you'll create the opportunity for a stronger emotional bond between the two of you.



Bodywork helps children with ADHD succeed in the classroom, boosting self-esteem.

Massage for Your Teenager?

Bodywork Can Ease Adolescent Angst

While teens may be less likely than their parents to go to a massage therapist, there are plenty of reasons why this age group should be encouraged to give it a try. The benefits of massage are well documented, among them relief of muscle tension, lowered stress hormones, increased sense of relaxation, improved immune function, and even a heightened ability to concentrate, according to studies conducted by the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine. But for teenagers, there's an additional payback.

The teenage body is in the midst of transformation -- exponential growth and development in a rapid period of time. On the physical side, teens may be at increased risk for aches, pains, and injury. Many teens strain their bodies with competitive sports, get erratic sleep, and consume a less-than-optimal diet. Massage can help muscles recover from overuse, and help balance the body and maintain that stability.

Perhaps even more crucial, teen massage can help improve body image and sleep patterns, and contribute to decreased depression, anxiety, and stress. This keeps a teen connected to her body, even as it morphs in confounding ways. "Many teens are self-conscious, and not happy with their bodies," says Eiris Kallil, massage therapist and shiatsu instructor at the Boulder College of Massage Therapy, in Colorado. "Massage can help teens stay grounded." Bodywork has also been reported to help mediate eating disorders, a growing concern among teens.

Another potential plus: A beneficial, therapeutic relationship can develop between bodyworkers and teenagers during the years when adolescents need adult confidantes, but keep parents at a distance. The practitioner can become a supportive, trusted adult in a teen's life. And the session itself, according to Kallil, can be a way to deal with all the physical and emotional turmoil of this tender age.



Massage eases teen depression and anxiety.

The Art of Aromatherapy

Essential Oils Provide Healing and Balance

Aromatic essential oils extracted from herbs, flowers, resin, wood and roots have long been a source of healing, aiding in relaxation, circulation and wound healing. However, the use of these medicinal oils declined as the modern pharmaceutical industry developed. In 1928, French chemist Rene Maurice Gattefosse revived the use of essential oils and developed the art and science of utilizing naturally extracted aromatic essences from botanicals to balance and harmonize the health of body, mind, and spirit. Gattefosse coined the practice aromatherapy.

Because of aromatherapy's affect on emotional health, many practitioners incorporate this noninvasive treatment into their practices. Dispensers or diffusers filled with aromatic essences

may be used to scent the room, and specific essential oils are used on the client's skin during massage. Because each oil has unique characteristics and benefits, the choice of oil or oils can be customized to the client's needs and emotional state. Whether inhaled or applied topically, aromatherapy requires an understanding of how each essential oil interacts with the body, as well as the mind. Many pure essential oils need to be diluted, as they can cause irritation when applied directly to the skin, and training is necessary to guarantee safe and correct usage.

The emotions listed below can be gently eased by one or a combination of the following essential oils:

Anxiety: bergamot, cedarwood, clary sage, frankincense, lavender, patchouli,

Roman chamomile, rose, sandalwood.

Fatigue, Burnout: basil, ginger, grapefruit, jasmine, lemon, peppermint, rosemary, sandalwood.

Stress: bergamot, frankincense, geranium, lavender, mandarin, neroli, patchouli, Roman chamomile, ylang ylang.

Anger: jasmine, neroli, orange, patchouli, petitgrain, Roman chamomile, rose, vetiver, ylang ylang.

*Do all things
with an happy
heart and
positive
intentions, and
you will receive
what you need
in life.*

-El Deana Pearson

With school sessions starting up again soon I think about the struggles some parents and children may be having with anxiety, depression and maybe even ADHD. This special edition is dedicated to those who need a little extra help with focus and relaxation.

After reading this issue of Custom Essentials, give El Deana a call so you can gain your much needed focus.

One day, one massage at a time I hope to help people be the best that they can be.

Mention that you read this newsletter, and receive 20% off your first service.

I hope to see you soon!

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