

# How Massage Therapy Works

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If you have ever had a massage, you know it feels good. You also most likely experienced relaxation, as well as physical, emotional, and psychological benefits from your massage. Perhaps you are always in such a state of euphoria during and after a massage that you have never thought to wonder how massage therapy works.

Massage therapy works by causing physiological changes in your body, including mechanical responses and the relaxation response. When you receive massage therapy, you experience an involuntary and predictable nervous system response called the relaxation response. As physical pressure is applied during a massage to the soft tissues of your body, you experience the physical effects of the massage, or the mechanical response. As you experience both the relaxation response and the mechanical responses, you receive the physical and emotional benefits of massage therapy.

## The Relaxation Response

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Your body opens up during a massage and your personal barriers are removed, as you become more trusting in the massage therapist's technique and touch. This trust is what allows you to relax. The feeling of relaxation, combined with the pain relief received during a massage, creates the relaxation response.

Physical signs of the relaxation response:

- Slowed heart rate
- Slowed breathing
- Reduced blood pressure
- Reduced production of stress hormones
- Relaxed muscles
- Increased levels of available serotonin (possible)

Not only does the relaxation response provide immediate benefits, but it can also help prevent the onset of stress related ailments like persistent fatigue, anxiety, hypertension, psychological issues, insomnia, digestive disorders, sexual dysfunction, cardiac arrhythmias, and more.

## Mechanical Responses

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The two main benefits of the physical muscular manipulation during massage therapy are:

1. The normalization and relaxation of the body's soft tissues, connective tissues, and nerves.
2. The improvement of the circulatory and lymphatic systems.

## Improvement in Circulation

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Massage therapy can bring improvement to the lymphatic and circulatory systems. When the circulatory system is improved, it improves the delivery of nutrients and oxygen to the cells in your muscles. Healthier muscle cells lead to healthier and better performing muscles. Muscles are also able to remove waste products, further improving their health.

## Relaxation of Tissue

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Muscles get sore and can even experience spasms. Massage therapy relaxes the muscle tissue. Massage also eases nerve compression. During muscular contraction, not only is the muscle contracted and compressed, but also the nerves around the contracted muscle. By relaxing the muscle, the nerves around the muscle are also no longer compressed and are allowed to relax.

Pressure and touch applied to the skin and muscles of the body relaxes muscles and nerves. Even certain deep muscular structures can experience the side benefits of massage therapy. While it is not always possible for a massage therapist to relax and heal tissues situated deeper in the body, deeper tissues oftentimes relax, because the more superficial layers of muscle have relaxed and are no longer contributing to the contraction or compression of the deeper tissues.

Massage therapy works by triggering two responses in the body: the relaxation response and mechanical responses. Through technique, touch, and the manipulation of the muscles of the body, massage therapy is able to provide immediate and long term benefits to its recipients. Plus, it just plain feels good.