

Therapeutic massage takes on cancer fatigue

March 12 2015, by Kathi Baker

In a continuation of clinical trials related to the biological benefits of massage therapy, Emory researchers are currently studying how massage may help reduce fatigue in breast cancer patients.

Previous research conducted by Mark Hyman Rapaport, MD, Reunette W. Harris professor and chair of Emory's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, has already shown that [massage therapy](#) can boost the immune system and decrease anxiety for people who do not have [cancer](#).

"We decided to look at [massage](#) therapy for cancer fatigue because cancer-related fatigue is one of the most prevalent and debilitating symptoms experienced by people with cancer," explains Rapaport, principle investigator for this study. "Many studies investigating massage for patients with cancer have been focused on depression, anxiety or pain."

The Emory cancer fatigue study is a collaboration between the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and the Winship Cancer Institute of Emory. Mylin Torres, MD, assistant professor in Emory's Department of Radiation Oncology, serves as a co-investigator. Torres specializes in the treatment of [breast cancer](#), and sees her patients at Winship.

"We already know that frequent massage can enhance the immune system and reduce anxiety, and it has been reported that massage therapy can stimulate energy, and reduce symptoms such as nausea and pain,"

says Torres. "We believe that there are many positive effects to be gained by therapeutic massage and we hope to prove that, among other biological advantages, massage may diminish the incapacitation that cancer-related fatigue can cause for our patients."

Participants in the study are post-surgery [breast cancer patients](#), between the ages of 18 and 65, who have been treated with standard chemotherapy, chemoprevention and/or radiation, and are suffering with cancer-related fatigue. The study patients are between six months and four years post treatment. Researchers plan to enroll a total of 72 patients over the course of the study.

During six weeks of treatments, participants are assigned to one of three study groups: six weeks of a once-a-week Swedish massage, six weeks of once-a-week light touch massage or a six-week wait period, followed by six weeks of either light touch or Swedish massage. Certified [massage therapists](#) from the Atlanta School of Massage perform the massages.

Over the course of the treatment visits, information needed to assess the effect of the study will be gathered through a variety of measures. Vital signs, such as pulse and blood pressure are taken at each visit, and at three of the six study visits a small amount of blood is utilized to check for levels of immune markers. The study staff asks questions about such things as life stressors, medical health and the use of medicine and other substances. Participants also fill out a questionnaire on [fatigue](#) and quality of life.

Investigators will analyze and compile the data from the information received from the assessments to make a final evaluation of the success of this treatment.

The researchers say that over 50 percent of patients with cancer have used a complementary and alternative medicine approach for symptom

management and to improve quality of life. Scientific studies like this are needed to identify alternative treatments that work for these [patients](#).

Provided by Emory University

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