

Soft-tissue Massage for Shoulder Pain

Soft-tissue massage improved range of motion, reduced pain and improved function in people with shoulder pain, according to a research study.

"A trial into the effectiveness of soft tissue massage in the treatment of shoulder pain" was conducted by staff at Auburn Hospital and Concord Repatriation General Hospital in Sydney, Australia.

Twenty-nine subjects who had been referred to the Concord hospital for management of shoulder pain participated in the study. Their medical diagnoses varied, but impingement, rotator-cuff tear and unspecified shoulder pain were the most common diagnoses.

Fourteen of the participants were randomly assigned to the control group, where they were placed on a waiting list for massage and received no treatment for two weeks.

Fifteen of the participants were randomly assigned to the massage group, where they received six sessions of soft-tissue massage around the shoulder for two weeks. The massage included the lateral border of the scapula, in full shoulder flexion; posterior deltoid, at end-of-range horizontal flexion; anterior deltoid, at end-of-range hand-behind-back; and pectoralis major, in the stretch position. Each session lasted 15-20 minutes.

Active range of motion was evaluated for flexion, abduction and hand-behind-back movements before and after the study. Pain was assessed on the Short Form McGill Pain Questionnaire, and functional ability was assessed with the Patient Specific Functional Disability Measure, both before and after the study period.

Subjects in the control group showed no significant improvements from the beginning to the end of the two-week period. Subjects in the massage group showed significant improvements in all measures, with a mean improvement of 22.6 degrees in flexion; 42.2 degrees in abduction; and the ability to reach a mean of 11 centimeters further up the back. Subjects in the massage group also reported decreased pain and improved function.

"This randomized, controlled trial has shown that soft tissue massage around the shoulder in subjects with shoulder pain of local mechanical origin produces significantly greater improvements in pain, function and range of motion than does no treatment over a two-week period," state the study's authors.

"The fact that these patients improved with such a wide range of diagnoses points to the potential generalisability of the effects of this massage in patients with shoulder pain of local mechanical origin."

- **Source:** Auburn Hospital and Concord Repatriation General Hospital in Sydney, Australia. Authors: Paul A. van den Dolder and David L. Roberts. Originally published in the Australian Journal of Physiotherapy 2003, Vol. 49, pp. 183-188.