

## Office Massage Reduces Strain, Blood Pressure

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Both strain and blood pressure were significantly reduced among employees who received, in the office setting, one 20-minute massage per week for four weeks, according to a recent study.

The research, "Massage therapy in the workplace: Reducing employee strain and blood pressure," involved 28 participants with a mean age of 39 years, all of whom worked in a government office.

The subjects were randomly assigned to either the massage group or a control group, with 14 people in each one. Each week for the four-week intervention period, subjects in the massage group had their blood pressure measured, completed the 20-item Bartone Strain Scale and then received a 20-minute seated massage. Blood pressure again was measured following each 20-minute session. Subjects assigned to the control group had their blood pressure measured and completed the strain survey once per week for four weeks.

The 20-item Bartone Strain Scale is used to evaluate the symptoms of psychological and physical strain. The scale measures how often people experienced certain health issues the previous week, such as trouble sleeping, general aches and pains, loss of interest, nervousness or tenseness. It uses a five-point rating system that ranges from never to always.

The massage protocol used in this study consisted of each participant seated around a boardroom table, leaned forward at the hip with his or her head and arms on a pillow. The 20-minute sessions were performed by students from a local massage school, with guidance from their teachers. These sessions focused on massage of the back, neck, head, arms, wrists and hands.

Following the four-week intervention phase, researchers discovered that strain decreased significantly in the massage group from week one to week four of the study, whereas there were no significant changes in strain levels among the control group.

They also found that both systolic and diastolic blood pressure decreased across the four sessions for those in the massage group, with no significant changes to blood pressure noted in the control subjects. This study showed a significant decrease in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure within each of the four massage sessions as well.

"High levels of stressors or subjectively appraised stress experienced by employees is limiting, can stunt employee output, decrease concentration and increase strain symptoms," state the study's authors. "On-site massage of the type investigated here is a promising means of stress reduction and health promotion within organizations."

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Sources: Saint Mary's University and ICT Northumberland College, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Originally published in *Giornale Italiano di Medicina del Lavoro ed Ergonomia*, 2009 (31) 3: 25-30.