

Massage Therapy in Breast Cancer Patients



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Massage therapy is the fastest growing CAM used by breast cancer patients and survivors; it is offered on-site by many leading cancer centers. Massage therapy provides drug-free, no side-effect amelioration of symptoms of chemotherapy, radiation and breast cancer surgery. We strongly advocate the consistent integration of massage therapy into each patient's treatment plan through development of an on-site massage therapy programs.

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Massage therapy is the fastest growing form of complimentary/alternative medicine (CAM) sought and recommended for breast cancer patients. Over 80% of all female breast cancer patients report using CAM; therefore, CAM is no longer an “alternative” or “unusual” choice for managing breast cancer and symptoms of its treatment.¹ Major cancer care centers, such as Fox Chase Cancer Center (Philadelphia), Memorial Sloan-Kettering (New York City), and the New Mexico Cancer Associates (Santa Fe) provide on-site massage therapy for breast cancer patients.³

Benefits of massage therapy are both physiological and psychological. Breast cancer patients receiving massage therapy showed improved blood pressure, respiration, and heart rate measurements.² While undergoing chemotherapy treatments, breast cancer patients benefit immediately from massage therapy, which “significantly reduces chemo-induced nausea, diarrhea and vomiting.”³ In fact, slow-stroke back massage administered before and after chemotherapy alleviates these troublesome side effects.³ Often, a patient’s high level of anxiety or anticipation of experiencing nausea causes nausea and other GI side effects. Massage therapy relaxes the patient, reducing pain, anxiety and GI symptoms of chemotherapy and radiation side effects.

For breast cancer patients undergoing radiation, massage therapy reduces side effects of treatment itself and can help dissolve radiation-induced fibrosis months and years after treatment has finished³. Communication between the massage therapist, patient and oncologist/radiation oncologist will provide a basis for highest-quality care.

Since massage therapy is not a drug, it has no negative side effects, no drug interactions, and may be widely prescribed. The only “side effect” massage therapy has is that its “beneficial effects last up to 48 hours”². Massage therapy actually reduces the need for prescription pain killers, anti-anxiety medication, and other pharmaceutical (prescription and OTC) thus reducing patient treatment costs and possible drug interactions. In a Sloan-Kettering study on complimentary therapies in cancer care, findings showed a decrease in NSAID use among patients who received massage therapy.² Since most health insurance plans offer coverage for massage therapy, financial and physical/emotional impacts of breast cancer diagnosis on patients can be lightened by on-site provision of massage therapy.

Given the benefits of massage therapy, we strongly recommend a consistent integration of massage therapy into the treatment plans for all breast cancer patients. Offering on-site massage therapy is the most efficient way to deliver this treatment plan to patients at the highest quality possible. It increases treatment availability while guaranteeing professional-quality care.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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To have a copy of this proposal emailed to you and/or colleagues, please contact

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