Weekly Massage Reduces Stress Symptoms in Nurses

Massage therapy decreased nurses' stress, in a study conducted to compare the stress levels of nurses who received a 15-minute back massage once a week with that of nurses who did not receive any treatment. “The effectiveness of a 15 minute weekly massage in reducing physical and psychological stress in nurses” measured the physiological and psychological stress levels of 60 nurses at an acute-care hospital in Queensland, Australia.

Nurses volunteered to participate in the five-week study and were randomly assigned to the experimental group or the control group. The participants completed a life-events questionnaire, based on the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, which measured the nurses’ perceptions of their personal lives over the previous four-week period. It was used to evaluate situational stress, which may have affected stress indicators.

The experimental group received a full back (Swedish) massage with grape seed oil once a week. The room in which they received the massage was conveniently located for easy access from all clinical areas. It was relatively quiet, lit with natural light and air conditioned to maintain a comfortable temperature.

Physiological stress in both groups was measured at week one, week three and week five by urinary cortisol and blood pressure readings. Anxiety symptoms were measured at week one and week five with the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory.

Although the results of the physiological stress-level measurements were not statistically significant, the psychological stress levels of the control group increased over the five-week period, while the stress levels of the experimental group decreased. The difference between the control group and the test group were statistically significant. Ultimately, the study concluded that “massage therapy is a beneficial tool for the health of nurses as it may reduce psychological stress levels.” The authors recommend that further large studies be conducted in which the symptoms of stress are measured rather than the physiological stress indicators in nurses.

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