

# Massage for Stroke Patients

*Stroke is said to be the 3rd leading cause of death in America and the number one cause of disability among adults. Find out how massage therapy can help.*

*Sylvia Carlson* ([/sylvia-carlson](#)) Oct 19, 2006

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### What is a Stroke?

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, a stroke is defined as a sudden loss of brain function. It can be caused by a change in the blood flow to the brain, or an actual rupture of the blood vessels feeding the brain. In rare cases, a cardiac arrest can also cause stroke-like damage to the brain. Without oxygen and a continuous flow of blood and nutrients to the brain, the greater the likelihood of brain damage.

### Effects of a Stroke

Depending on where the damage has occurred in the brain, the effects of a stroke can vary widely. It can affect you physically (weakness, paralysis, movement limitations, pain, fatigue, sleep problems), emotionally (fluctuating emotions, anxiety, depression), and mentally (thinking, talking and memory difficulties).

If damage occurred in the left hemisphere of the brain, some of the effects might include:

- Weakness or paralysis on the right side of the body. Edit draft Edit

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- Trouble reading, talking, thinking or solving math problems

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If damage occurred in the right hemisphere of the brain, some of the effects might include:

- Weakness or paralysis on the left side of your body
- Visual and spatial difficulties
- Short term memory problems

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## Can Massage Benefit Stroke Patients?

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Rehabilitation for stroke patients typically involves physical therapy, speech therapy and/or occupational therapy. Unfortunately, massage therapy is rarely mentioned as one of the therapies of choice.  
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Scientific evidence aside, I think it would be hard to dispute the argument that massage can help someone who has experienced a stroke. At the very least, we know that massage helps to relax, reduce stress, improve circulation, and decrease pain.

## Massage Therapy Research Studies - the Effects of Massage for Stroke Patients

While there have not been many studies conducted on the effects of massage for stroke patients, there are two worth mentioning:

A Swedish research study investigated the importance of massage for the recovery and well being of stroke patients. It was a smaller-scale randomized controlled study carried out at a Swedish geriatric clinic from 1998 to 1999. The patients who received tactile massage experienced a significantly higher quality of life, showed an improvement in general hygiene and mobility, and used less medication, in particular for pain and depression.

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In 2004, a research study was conducted with 102 subjects on “The effects of slow-stroke back massage on anxiety and shoulder pain in elderly stroke patients.” It was conducted by staff at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Department of Nursing and Wong Chuk Hang Hospital, in Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong.[1] The massage group received 10 minutes of slow-stroke back massage before bedtime for seven nights.

Subjects in the control group received standard care.

Results of this study showed that 10 minutes of nightly slow-stroke back massage had significantly reduced pain, anxiety, blood pressure and heart rate, as compared to subjects in the control group. Ten minutes of massage. That’s pretty significant.

So can massage really benefit people who have had a stroke? Talk to someone who has had a stroke, and you will learn how difficult it is to deal with the numerous effects of a stroke. I am of the belief that you can help to relax, ease pain, and comfort the person who has had a stroke with the touch of your hand. Massage can also help to increase circulation to areas in the body that have been affected by a stroke.

### What Can You Do?

Most cities and townships have a continuing education department or recreation centre where you could take an introductory course on the basics of the Swedish massage technique. Also, some massage clinics and massage therapists specialize in home or hospital visits if you should require the services of a professional therapist.

Rehabilitation from a stroke can often take months or years, so why not help to improve the quality of life of someone you know who has had a stroke.

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