

A randomised crossover trial: Comparing Thai and Swedish massage for fatigue and depleted energy

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This research aimed to compare the efficacy of Thai and Swedish massage for patients experiencing fatigue or low energy. Although fatigue and low energy can be a normal physiological response to lifestyle factors such as physical exertion or lack of sleep, it is also associated with many medical disorders and can severely exacerbate the symptoms experienced by patients or hinder their recovery and rehabilitation. Research has shown that massage therapy can effectively reduce fatigue in patients presenting with physical conditions and provide beneficial psychological effects.

Participants ($N = 20$) were recruited via a UK University staff e-mail. Research ethics clearance was obtained and consent forms completed before baseline data collection. Participants were randomised to receive three once-weekly Thai massage treatments and three once-weekly Swedish massage treatments, with crossover after three massages. Full body Northern style Thai massage was carried out in the supine, prone, side-lying and seated positions. Full body Swedish massage with medium pressure was performed using grapeseed oil in the supine and prone positions. Data collection methods included symptom checklists administered at three time-points: Activation-Deactivation Adjective Check List (AD-ACL) which is a 20-item multi-dimensional psychometric test of various arousal states: energy, tiredness, tension and calmness; VAS scales for pain and fatigue. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant diary entries, content and thematic analysis were used respectively. There were no conflicts of interest and participants were not offered incentives for participation.

Both Thai and Swedish massage showed improvements in sleep, relaxation/de-stressing and relief of muscular aches and pains. On comparing the massage types, clear large, moderate or small differences ($d = 0.11$ to 1.31) in change from baseline were found in favour of Thai massage. Thai massage was more effective in improving energy and relieving muscle tension ($d = 1.34, 0.59$), although Swedish massage was more effective for relaxing and de-stressing effects ($d = 0.28$). Thematic analysis showed Thai massage having posture, flexibility, and physical and psychological stimulating effects. Overall, eighteen participants found that their depleted energy or fatigue issues had been addressed.

Participants in this study found that six weekly massages (three of TM and three of SM) were effective in addressing fatigue or low energy by releasing stress, promoting relaxation and relieving muscular aches and pains in the participants. The results of this exploratory study show indications that Thai massage reduced fatigue by inducing an energising, rejuvenating effect and Swedish massage reduced fatigue through alleviation of stress and promotion of relaxation.

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Reference

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