

Bodywork for Osteoarthritis: Can it help?

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Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis affecting of 30 million people in the US alone. The joints affected by osteoarthritis wear and tear, or degenerate, decreasing the cartilage that allows for the joint to slide effortlessly. This cartilage becomes rough and in time can even degenerate to the point where joint movement is bone on bone.

This leads to pain, tenderness, stiffness, loss of flexibility, as well as grating of the joint and spurs. The symptoms can be managed though the condition cannot be reversed. Active healthy living can help slow the progression of the condition.

A variety of risk factors play a part in the development of osteoarthritis including genetics, age, sex, and weight. Even Injuries from years ago can increase the risk of osteoarthritis. Certain occupations, especially those incorporating repetitive actions, can also play a part. For instance, a person using a keyboard and mouse primarily in their day to day life could have a higher risk for developing osteoarthritis of the wrist.

How can body work help?

- 1) Pain – Massage can help pain management by relaxing aggravated muscles, tendons and joints. Massage decreases the stress hormone cortisol and can boost serotonin; studies have also shown that massage can decrease substance P, a neurotransmitter associated with pain.
- 2) Decrease Swelling – Massage and body work can help push extracellular fluid and decrease pressure from swelling on affected joints.
- 3) Posture – Massage and body work can help align the body, causing a more even distribution of weight on the joints in the body. This can help decrease pain from extra pressure on specific joints as well as slow down the rate of degeneration on joints receiving extra pressure.
- 4) Flexibility – Massage and body work helps break up adhesion and increase natural lubrication to the joints, allowing more movement with less pain.

Finally, as the bodywork recipient begins to experience the four benefits listed above, the nervous system will begin to re-educate, or “reset” as I like to think of it, better body movement. Efficient body movement leads to less pain, more mobility, and decreased rate of degeneration. In summary, if you are

suffering with the painful and restricting sequela of osteoarthritis, bodywork can help alleviate these symptoms and slow down the condition's progress.