

Does massage prevent pressure injuries?

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Question

What is the evidence around massage for the prevention of pressure injuries?

Search methods

Evidence searches were conducted to obtain the highest quality of evidence review available

Searches included:

- The Cochrane library (searched on 21/07/2016)
- NICE guidelines
- NHMRC guideline portal

Summary of findings

Searches identified one Cochrane review¹, one NICE guideline². Searching the NHMRC did not return any approved guidelines relating to massage and pressure injuries. Evidence from Cochrane and NICE is summarised below.

Cochrane Review

One recent Cochrane review was found exploring massage and pressure injuries¹. The objective of the review was to assess the current evidence for the effects of massage compared with placebo standard care or other interventions for prevention of pressure ulcers in at-risk populations. The review sought to answer the following questions: Does massage reduce the incidence of pressure ulcers of any grade? Is massage safe in the short- and long-term? If not, what are the adverse events associated with massage?

Six databases were searched for all randomised controlled trials and quasi-randomised controlled trials that evaluated the effects of massage therapy for the prevention of pressure ulcers. The primary outcome was the proportion of people developing a new pressure ulcer of any grade. No date or language restrictions were applied. The medical literature was searched up to 8 January 2015.

No randomised controlled trials or quasi-randomised trials comparing massage with placebo, standard care or with other therapies amongst people at risk of developing a pressure ulcer. Of those studies excluded, there was one narrative study discussed the potential benefits of massage for this purpose³, and three randomised controlled trials, none of which met the inclusion criteria^{4,5,6}. Two of these trials were cross-over trials with a cluster randomisation^{4,5}, and one evaluated the effects of massage by measuring skin temperature at the sacral site⁶.

The Cochrane review also commented on clinical guidelines and stated that *“although guidelines advise against the use of massage^{2,7,8}, there is a lack of evidence in this area. This means that we still do not know if massage has an effect when used as an intervention to prevent pressure ulcers.”*³

Therefore, there is currently no evidence to support or reject massage therapy as a preventative treatment for pressure ulcers.

NICE Guideline

Current NICE guidelines for clinical practice specifically state for adults: “Do not offer skin massage or rubbing to adults to prevent a pressure ulcer.”

Current Monash Health protocols

Currently, the Monash Health protocols and procedures are based on the Pan Pacific Clinical Practice Guideline for the Prevention and Management of Pressure Injury⁷. This document does not include guidance regarding massage for the prevention of pressure ulcers.

References

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