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Effect of massage therapy on stress levels and quality of life in brain tumor patients-observations from a pilot study.

BACKGROUND: Patients with brain tumors report experiencing elevated levels of stress across the disease continuum. Massage therapy is a commonly used complementary therapy and is employed in cancer care to reduce psychological stress and to improve quality of life (QoL). The purpose of this pilot study was to obtain a preliminary assessment of the efficacy of massage therapy on patient reported psychological outcomes and QoL.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: The design of the study was a prospective, single-arm intervention. Participants were newly diagnosed primary brain tumor patients who reported experiencing stress and who received a total of eight massages over a period of 4 weeks. Participants completed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and the Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy-Brain to assess their stress level and QoL.

RESULTS: As a group, levels of stress dropped significantly between weeks 2 and 3 ($M = 12.3$, $SD = 3.09$, $P \leq 0.010$). A trend for the reduction in stress continued through week 4 ($P \leq 0.063$). At the end of week 4, PSS-10 scores of all participants were below the threshold for being considered stressed. By the end of the intervention, participants reported significant improvements in three test domains, emotional well-being, additional brain tumor concerns, and social/family well-being.

CONCLUSION: This study indicates that participation in a massage therapy program is both feasible and acceptable to newly diagnosed brain tumor patients experiencing stress. Furthermore, participants in this study reported improvements in stress and their QoL while receiving massage therapy.
