



## **Benefits of Massage Therapy on Parkinson's Disease**

In addition to its tragic impact on voluntary motor skills, Parkinson's disease typically causes muscle stiffness and rigidity. Parkinson's disease is a fairly common progressive degenerative central nervous system disorder that affects about one in 1,000 people in the United States; Parkinson's disease is a dysfunction in the basal ganglia, an area of the brain that controls voluntary movement. Characteristic symptoms of this chronic, progressive neurodegenerative movement disorder include tremors, rigidity, slow movement, poor balance and difficulty walking.

Parkinson's disease results from the degeneration of dopamine-producing nerve cells in the brain. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that stimulates motor neurons, the nerve cells that control muscles. When dopamine production is depleted, the motor system nerves are unable to control movement and coordination. People with Parkinson's disease have lost 80% or more of their dopamine-producing cells by the time symptoms appear. While symptoms may appear at any age, the average age of onset is 60 years old.

There has been an increasing number of those affected with Parkinson's that are turning to complementary therapies for help.

The benefits of massage therapy have long been recognized by people with Parkinson's disease. Given that Parkinson's disease typically causes muscle stiffness and rigidity, it seems logical to receive massage to alleviate joint and muscle stiffness. As long as the client has sensation in the area(s) being addressed, it's safe for bodywork to occur. It is extremely important to communicate with a client throughout a bodywork session to ensure a positive experience. However, it is important to note that Parkinson's disease is a central nervous system dysfunction and will not be completely resolved with bodywork alone.

A 2002 study conducted by the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami along with staff from the university's neurology department and Duke University's pharmacology department showed that Parkinson's disease symptoms were reduced by massage therapy. In this study, the group of adults with Parkinson's disease who received two massages a week for five weeks experienced improved daily functioning, increased quality of sleep and decreased stress-hormone levels. The study's authors reported, "These findings suggest that massage therapy enhances functioning in progressive or degenerative central nervous system disorders or conditions."