



# Massage May Help Dementia Patients With Agitation

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Massage could offer a drug-free way to treat agitation and [depression](#) among [dementia](#) patients, but there are still too few studies about the practice to know for sure, according to a review of recent research.

In two studies, hand massage and gentle touching during conversation helped ease agitation and restore appetite in dementia patients over short periods of about an hour.

"Although the available reliable evidence supports the use of massage and touch, it is so limited in scope that it is not possible to draw general conclusions about benefits in dementia," say lead authors Dr. Niels Viggo Hansen and colleagues.

"However, even if touch therapy aims only to reintroduce something which has been lost in the professionalization and institutionalization of care, it may still turn out to be a relatively effective, inexpensive and low-risk intervention," said Viggo Hansen, of the Knowledge and Research Center for Alternative Medicine, part of Denmark's Ministry of Health.

The review appears in the latest issue of The Cochrane Library, a publication of The Cochrane Collaboration, an international organization that evaluates medical research. Systematic reviews draw evidence-based conclusions about medical practice after considering both the content and quality of existing medical trials on a topic.

The Cochrane reviewers could only find two small studies, involving a total of 110 participants, of high enough quality to include in the review. Although the effect on behavior in the two studies was short-lived, some researchers and caregivers suggest that massage might also improve memory and cognition in those with dementia.

Cynthia Bologna, a Petaluma, Calif., massage therapist who works extensively with people with dementia, said she often works with patients to bring about short-term effects

such as relaxation.

However, Bologna has noticed some long-term effects and said her clients "respond with recognition to the quality of my touch" even when they don't remember her name or recognize her from visit to visit. "So whereas I'm not sure about long-term cognitive memory, it seems as though their sensory memory is being enhanced," she said.

Viggo Hansen N, Jorgensen T, Ortenblad L. Massage and touch for dementia The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2006, Issue 4.

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international nonprofit, independent organization that produces and disseminates systematic reviews of health care interventions and promotes the search for evidence in the form of clinical trials and other studies of interventions. Visit <http://www.cochrane.org> for more information.