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Simple Massage Can Help Patients With Chronic Tension Headache

Posted on: Thursday, 8 July 2010, 13:29 CDT

Researchers at the University of Granada - in collaboration with the Clinical Hospital San Cecilio and the University Rey Juan Carlos - have proven that the psychological and physiological state of patients with tension headache improves within 24 hours after receiving a 30-minute massage.

As researchers explained, tension headaches have an increasing incidence in the population. This type of disorder is usually treated with analgesics, that relieve symptoms temporarily. One of the main causes of this type of headache is the presence of trigger points. Recently, new strategies for controlling this disabling pain are being studied.

Physiological improvement

The researcher Cristina Toro Velasco - leader of the study, under Professor Manuel Arroyo Morales supervision - has proven that a 30-minute massage on cervical trigger points improves autonomic nervous system regulation in these patients. Additionally, patients exhibit a better psychological state and "reduce the stress and anxiety associated to such a disturbing disorder".

Similarly, patients report a perceived relief from symptoms within 24 hours after the massage. This might mean that massages may reduce the pain caused by trigger points, which would involve an improvement in the general state of patients.

The results of this pioneer study were published in American Journal of Manipulative Physiological and Therapeutics.

References: Toro-Velasco C, Arroyo-Morales M, Fernández-de-Las-Peñas C, Cleland JA, Barrero-Hernández FJ. Short-term effects of manual therapy on heart rate variability, mood state, and pressure pain sensitivity in patients with chronic tension-type headache: a pilot study. J Manipulative Physiol Ther. 2009 Sep;32(7):527-35.

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