Non-Drug Pain Relief: Hand Massage

Massage is the stroking or rubbing of the skin for pain relief or relaxation. Hand massage can be used to reduce pain by soothing the skin and relaxing tense muscles. Hand massage does not replace pain medicine. It works with your pain medicine to help you get better pain relief.

Special Precautions

- Do not massage areas being treated with radiation therapy.
- Do not massage an open skin wound.
- Do not massage a sore that is healing.
- Do not massage areas sensitive to touch or if massage makes your pain worse.
- Massage should not be done over the area where a tumor is located or over any area with bone metastasis.

Supplies

- Massage oil or lotion
- A large towel or blanket

Directions

1. The most common area for massage is the back and shoulders. If it hurts to massage these areas, a foot or hand rub may be as relaxing.
2. Remove clothing from the area to be massaged.
3. The person getting the massage and the person giving the massage should be in comfortable positions.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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4. For warmth and privacy, cover the parts of the body not being massaged.

5. Use massage oil or lotion, to keep the movement slippery. Friction caused by rubbing the skin without lotion or massage oil can cause more soreness and discomfort. If lotion is used, warm it first in your hand or by putting the container in a pan of warm water. Test the temperature of the lotion first, before placing it on the skin.

6. Choose a time that is right for you. It is best to get a massage before your pain becomes severe, when you are tired or if you start to get anxious. Make a time each day to have a massage.

7. The amount of time for the massage depends on the person. A few minutes may be all that is needed to help reduce your pain.

8. Use long, firm strokes in the area being massaged. Start from the part of the body that is the greatest distance away from the center and work toward your head. This helps increase blood flow. If the hands and feet are massaged, rub each finger and toe separately.

9. It is important to tell the person giving the massage what feels the best. Tell the person if softer or firmer strokes are more relaxing.

10. Massage is a time to relax. Think about how it feels and limit talking. It is helpful to have a massage in a quiet area, free from noise.

11. To help relax, some people like to have their favorite music playing while they are getting a massage.

12. If you are keeping a Pain Management Log, write down when you have a massage and how it makes you feel.