

A Single Massage Can Boost The Immune System

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Devotees of massage therapy know it's relaxing and feels good. But massage may also be an effective tool for maintaining good health. Researchers from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center reported this week that a single massage produced measurable changes in the immune system and endocrine system of healthy adults.

The researchers, led by Dr. Mark Rapaport, studied 29 healthy adults who received a 45-minute Swedish massage and 24 healthy adults who had a 45-minute session of light touch massage, a much milder exercise that served as a comparison to the more vigorous Swedish massage. Blood samples were taken before the massage began and at regular intervals up to one hour after the massage was completed.

The study found several changes in the blood tests of the Swedish massage group that indicated a benefit to the immune system. For example, Swedish massage caused sizeable decreases in arginine vasopressin, a hormone that contributes to aggressive behavior, and small decreases in the stress hormone cortisol. The Swedish massage participants also had an increase in lymphocytes, cells that help the immune system defend the body from harmful substances.

"This research indicates that massage doesn't only feel good, it also may be good for you," Rapaport said in a news release. "People often seek out massage as part of a healthy lifestyle but there hasn't been much physiological proof of the body's heightened immune response following massage until now."

The study appears in the October issue of the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine.

-- Shari Roan / Los Angeles Times