

6 Science-Supported Benefits of Thai Massage



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Thai massage, which originated in India, has been around for over 2,500 years. Originally regarded as a healing art, traditional Thai massage includes influences from both Ayurvedic and traditional Chinese medicine.

Unlike typical Western-type massages, it doesn't involve lying on a massage bed while a massage therapist applies oil to your body and kneads your muscles and pressure points.

Instead, you lie fully clothed on a mat on the ground while a practitioner uses stretching, pulling, and rocking techniques to relieve tension, promote relaxation, and improve flexibility and circulation.

Sometimes referred to as assisted yoga, Thai massage is focused on improving the flow of energy throughout your body.

In this article, we'll take a closer look at the science-backed benefits of traditional Thai massage and what to expect if you opt for this type of massage.


What are the benefits of traditional Thai massage?

Thai massage can benefit your health in numerous ways, many of which are supported by scientific studies.

Below, we explore six key benefits that are supported by research.

1. Relieves headaches


If you have [migraine](#) or experience [tension headaches](#), traditional Thai massage may help ease your symptoms.

In several small studies involving patients with chronic headaches, researchers found that Thai massage reduced the intensity of both [migraine](#)  and [tension headaches](#).

If you're interested in trying nonpharmaceutical remedies for headache relief, it's worth noting that researchers concluded that the benefits of Thai massage could last anywhere from several days to around 15 weeks.

2. Reduces back pain

Thai massage may be an effective, nonpharmaceutical means of reducing [back pain](#).

[Researchers](#)  in Thailand studied the effects of Thai massage on a group of 120 people with nonspecific low back pain. Half the test group was treated with Thai massage and the rest with other conservative management techniques that included joint mobilization (a technique that involves applying pressure), hot packs, and manual stretching to painful areas.

Both groups were treated twice a week for 4 weeks, and both groups had significant pain relief.

Other [studies](#)  have found that Thai massage reduces back pain associated with trigger points — tight, painful muscle clusters — in the

upper back.

3. Relieves joint stiffness and pain

Thai massage may improve your joint function if you experience pain and [stiffness](#) when you move.

In one study, [researchers](#) employed a program of Thai massage combined with wand exercises to study the effects on people with knee arthritis. The researchers found that the study participants felt less pain and walked with greater ease after the 8-week program.

In another [study](#) involving 60 patients with osteoarthritis of the knee, researchers found that 3 weeks of Thai massage provided the same pain relief as 3 weeks of ibuprofen.

4. Increases flexibility and range of motion

If your range of motion and flexibility are affecting your athletic performance or making it hard to get around, Thai massage may help you move more easily.

Thirty-four soccer players were part of an [experiment](#) to test the effects of Thai massage on athletic performance. After receiving Thai massage three times in a 10-day period, the soccer players showed significant improvement in their ability to do sit-and-reach exercises.

Researchers hypothesize that the increase in flexibility may be because Thai massage has the ability to improve blood flow and oxygen supply to muscles. This, in turn, may help reduce pain and decrease muscle adhesions.

The researchers also found that the Thai massage treatments improved the players' speed and agility on the field.

5. Eases anxiety

One of the most appealing aspects of massage therapy is the sense of calm and relaxation it can bring.

Although Thai massage is more energetic than other forms of massage therapy, it has been shown to lower [anxiety](#) and increase a systemic feeling of calm.

[Studies](#) ✓ have found that people who receive Thai massage test lower on measures of psychological stress following treatment.

Brain scans of people who received Thai massage treatments [showed more relaxation and much lower anxiety](#) ✓ than people who underwent physical therapy treatments for the same conditions.

6. Revives energy

Thai massage incorporates whole body movements, many of which are yoga-like. For that reason, many people report that they leave Thai massage sessions feeling not only relaxed but also rejuvenated.

In one [study](#), researchers compared the effects of Thai massage and [Swedish massage](#) on people who were fatigued.

They interviewed the participants after their massages and found that those who had Thai massage felt mentally invigorated and physically energized.

The study size was small, so more research needs to be done to confirm these results.

What techniques are used with Thai massage?

In a traditional Thai massage, practitioners use their hands, thumbs, elbows, forearms, and sometimes even their feet to reduce tension in your muscles.

Thai massage is based on the idea that energy moves through your body along predictable lines or pathways known as sens.

To increase the flow of energy along the sens, the practitioner will move your body into yoga-like positions in addition to pulling and rocking your body in various ways.

The combination of stretching, movement, and pressure is what distinguishes Thai massage from other types of massage.

Thai massage may be a good option for you if you want a more active type of massage, where you move and participate instead of lying down throughout your massage.

What to expect

With Thai massage, you can wear your own loose-fitting clothes, or the practitioner may have you change into scrub-like garments — a loose cotton top and drawstring pants. You keep your clothes on throughout the massage.

Typically, you'll lie on a mat or massage mattress on the floor, not on a massage table. Once on the mat, your practitioner will slowly move your body through multiple stretches, using the weight and pressure of their body to assist you.

Unlike a Swedish massage, oil isn't used and your muscles typically aren't kneaded. Instead, the practitioner will use their hands, thumbs, elbows, and knees to stretch, pull, and rock different parts of your body. They may even sit on you to stretch you into certain positions.

Some types of stretches may involve going through yoga-like movements with the practitioner holding or pulling you to maintain a pose.

If your muscles are sore or tense, you may feel some discomfort. If you do, let your practitioner know so the pressure and stretching can be reduced.

If you have an injury, or some part of your body is particularly sensitive to pain, be sure to let the practitioner know before they start the massage session.

Risks and safety

Because Thai massage has profound effects on your circulatory system, make sure you check with your doctor before you schedule a massage, especially if you have:

- heart disease or [coronary artery disease](#)
- [high blood pressure](#)

- conditions that affect your spine, including [osteoporosis](#) and neurological diseases
- [diabetes](#)
- recent surgery
- open wounds
- cancer

Thai massage isn't recommended for pregnant women.

In addition, medical experts recommend that you avoid massage if you have:

- [bleeding disorders](#)
- [deep vein thrombosis](#)
- burns
- [thrombocytopenia](#)

The bottom line

Thai massage is an ancient practice with many benefits that are supported by modern science. It may reduce the severity of your headaches, decrease lower back and joint pain, increase your flexibility, calm your anxieties, and energize your mind and body.

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the tension in your muscles.

Thai massage may not be safe for everyone. If you have an underlying health condition, be sure to find out from your doctor if this traditional form of massage is safe for you.

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