



Can Osteopathy Reduce Cancer-Related Pain In Older Patients?

WHAT IS OSTEOPATHY?

Osteopathy is a holistic treatment intended to stimulate the body's natural self-healing mechanisms through manual techniques such as aligning the spine, soft-tissue massage and gentle stretches. Osteopathic treatment is based on the premise that the body is a unified whole, so resolving chronic imbalances in the musculoskeletal system may promote improved function in other systems of the body.

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to be a global facilitator of health and wellness through access, education and advancement of Traditional & Complementary Medicine (T&CM). The World Health Organization (WHO) advises that lifestyle-related diseases (or non-communicable diseases) are responsible for more than 70% of deaths worldwide each year.

Knowledge represents empowerment. By sharing this evidence-based, peer-reviewed research, we aim to support everyday people to take ownership of their wellness, by making informed decisions and choices in conjunction with their health professional.

How This Study Could Help Support Your Cancer Treatment

The risk of developing cancer increases steeply as a person ages, with [an estimated 80% of all cancers](#) diagnosed in people older than 55 years of age. This study investigated osteopathy as a way of reducing cancer-related pain in older patients, and is titled:

OSTEOPATHIC MANIPULATIVE TREATMENT EFFECT ON PAIN RELIEF AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN ONCOLOGY GERIATRIC PATIENTS: A NONRANDOMIZED CONTROLLED CLINICAL TRIAL.

You can read the full study here: <https://bit.ly/3fBLHx1>

Why Is This Study Important?

According to projections from previous research quoted in this study, the number of older people suffering from cancer is predicted to rise significantly during the next two decades. Among hospitalised older patients, chronic pain is the most common complaint related to cancer, and often, pharmaceutical medication is the only support provided for managing chronic pain.

Especially in light of the “medical complexity of older cancer patients”, it can be a delicate balancing act to prescribe medication that has therapeutic benefits, while keeping potentially harmful side effects to a minimum. Age-related problems with mental function may also make pain management in older patients more challenging.

For these reasons, the use of T&CM modalities “is emerging as an important concept” for managing chronic cancer-related pain. If evidence can be found for the effectiveness of osteopathy in this context, it may offer a valuable way of reducing the medication load of older patients, and lessen the ‘collateral’ impact on wellness.

What Does This Mean For My Wellness?

For older cancer patients, the findings of this study suggest osteopathic manipulative treatment as well as physiotherapy may offer a non-pharmaceutical option for pain management. While osteopathy may provide meaningful benefits after two weeks of treatment, the results suggest physiotherapy alone may also be a way of reducing pain levels.

If there are obstacles to being treated by an osteopath, but physiotherapy is available, the results suggest a slight reduction in pain is still possible. However, without osteopathic treatment, this effect may be less pronounced and take longer to reach the point of statistical significance.

While the improvement in quality of life evaluated in this study was not great enough to be statistically significant, it is relevant that some improvement was noted. Future studies involving osteopathic treatment lasting longer than four weeks may be designed to investigate how a more long-term application of this modality may affect quality of life.

Limitations noted by the researchers included the small sample size and the lack of randomisation. However, the results suggest that further research into these “encouraging results” are warranted, and provide a starting point to inform larger studies in the future. On the basis of their findings, the authors of this study made recommendations regarding how future research could provide further evidence about the possible benefits of osteopathy for reducing cancer-related pain.



How Does This Relate to Osteopathy?

Research suggests osteopathy may have an anti-inflammatory effect, as well as supporting parasympathetic activity in the nervous system. [Parasympathetic functions include resting, digestion and slowing the heart rate.](#) There is also evidence quoted by the authors of this study that suggests osteopathy may have a role in “reducing pain and improving functional status” related to a variety of health problems.

In 2018, researchers affiliated with Fondazione Don Carlo Gnocchi research hospital in Italy published the results of a trial investigating the effectiveness of osteopathic manipulative treatment for reducing pain in older cancer patients aged 65 years and over. Half the participants were allocated to a treatment group receiving osteopathic treatment as well as physiotherapy. The remainder comprised a control group receiving physiotherapy alone. All participants in the study were permitted to use nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) as required.

No previous research was available exploring the benefits of osteopathic treatment in the context of cancer. If evidence could be found for the benefits of osteopathic treatment as a way of reducing cancer-related pain, it could provide a valuable non-pharmacological option for older patients.

Key Findings About Osteopathy for Reducing Cancer-Related Pain

- The treatment group receiving osteopathic manipulative therapy in addition to physiotherapy experienced a statistically significant reduction in pain after two weeks of treatment. This improvement continued, and after four weeks of treatment, there was a further reduction in pain levels.
- The researchers also reported a small but statistically significant decrease in pain scores after four weeks of physiotherapy alone, even though it was not anticipated that physiotherapy would be associated with diminished pain.
- The reduction in pain scores for those receiving only physiotherapy was approximately half of that associated with osteopathy.
- The treatment group reported an improvement in quality of life over the four weeks of the treatment, however the difference was not statistically significant.
- The control group also experienced a small improvement in quality of life in the same statistical range as the group receiving osteopathy. Researchers hypothesised that these findings were possibly impacted by the lack of a proper quality of life assessment tool for older cancer patients.

Disclaimer: The above does not constitute medical advice, and as with any exercise or wellness program, please consult your medical professional before commencing osteopathic manipulative treatment.

[Integrative Cancer Therapies](#) (ICT) is a peer-reviewed open access journal which focuses on a comprehensive model of integrative cancer treatment with an emphasis on scientific understanding of alternative and traditional medicine therapies.

Quoted from journal description

References

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[Challenge of cancer in the elderly | European Society for Medical Oncology](#)
[Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment Effect on Pain Relief and Quality of Life in Oncology Geriatric Patients | Integrative Cancer Therapies](#)
[Autonomic nervous system | Queensland Brain Institute](#)
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