

# Massage Benefits Are More Than Skin Deep

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**Does a good massage do more than just relax your muscles? To find out, researchers at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles recruited 53 healthy adults and randomly assigned 29 of them to a 45-minute session of deep-tissue Swedish massage and the other 24 to a session of light massage.**

All of the subjects were fitted with intravenous catheters so blood samples could be taken immediately before the massage and up to an hour afterward.

**To their surprise**, the researchers, sponsored by the [National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#), a division of the [National Institutes of Health](#), found that a single session of massage caused biological changes.

**Volunteers who received Swedish massage experienced significant decreases in levels of the stress hormone [cortisol](#) in blood and saliva, and in [arginine vasopressin](#), a hormone that can lead to increases in cortisol.**

**They also had increases in the number of lymphocytes, white blood cells that are part of the immune system.**

**Volunteers who had the light massage experienced greater increases in oxytocin, a hormone associated with contentment, than the Swedish massage group, and bigger decreases in adrenal corticotropin hormone, which stimulates the adrenal glands to release cortisol.**

[The study](#) was published online in The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine.

**The lead author, Dr. Mark Hyman Rapaport, chairman of psychiatry and behavioral neurosciences at Cedars-Sinai, said the findings were “very, very intriguing and very, very exciting**