

# Massage therapy for the treatment of painful peripheral neuropathy in HIV+ individuals.

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**Abstract:** ISSUE: HIV+ individuals may present with complaints of painful peripheral neuropathy which may not adequately respond to pharmacologic therapy. PROJECT: HIV+ individuals with painful peripheral neuropathy of the feet who had partial or no improvement in pain after pharmacologic therapy (i.e. narcotic analgesics, tricyclic antidepressants and/or serotonin reuptake inhibitors) were referred to occupational therapy (OT) for pain management and treatment from 09/11/95 to 10/24/96. OT treatment consisted of 8 sessions of massage therapy and instruction on a self performed home massage program. No changes in medications were made during the duration of the project. The Brief Pain Inventory (BPI) was used to measure quality and intensity of pain (scale: 1-10 points) prior to initiating OT massage therapy and after 8 treatment sessions. RESULTS: Seven HIV+ individuals (4 males; 3 females) with an age range of 28 to 49 years (mean 39.1) received 8 OT massage therapy treatments over an average of 58 days (range 25 to 126 days). Five patients reported improvement with a mean decrease in pain of 3.2 (range: 1 to 7). The mean CD4 count in the responder group was 183 (range 17-336). One female reported no response to therapy (CD4 = 114) and one male reported worsening pain (CD4 = 247). Both non-responders were diabetic. None of the responders had diabetes. LESSONS LEARNED: OT massage therapy decreased the intensity of painful peripheral neuropathy of the feet in 5 of 5 non-diabetic, HIV+ individuals who had previously had little or no response to pharmacologic therapy. Two diabetic HIV+ individuals did not report improvement. OT massage therapy may be beneficial in the treatment of painful peripheral neuropathy in some HIV+ individuals.

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