

Positive Touch – Chair Massage

• Benefits to the Employer

For the company which enables its staff to benefit from massage at work, it is a perfect way to demonstrate that you care for the wellbeing of your staff. It also provides an excellent incentive, work benefit or 'thank you' to your staff.

The research detailed below is provided to illustrate how chair massage at work can benefit your business. Most people agree that massage feels good, but it should not be viewed purely as a 'luxury' or 'treat' as its benefits extend way beyond this 'feel good factor'. We have already discussed the physiological affects of massage. Following is research specific to the workplace detailing the affects of work-related illness, specifically stress and subsequent absenteeism and its impact upon individuals, businesses and the economy as a whole. Also included is research conducted by the Touch Institute in Miami demonstrating the affects of chair massage at work. We hope that you can use this research to evaluate the value that our services may represent to your company.

Work related illness

Many studies in this area tend to focus upon the ambiguous term 'stress' and its associated symptoms. 'Stress' is a difficult term to define as it means many different things to different people, and at Positive Touch we prefer not to engage in too much discussion regarding its definition. Our concern is to understand work related stress and what this means to organisations and how massage at work could help to combat its affects.

Research commissioned during November 2000 by the International Stress Management Association UK and Royal SunAlliance reveals that 70% of UK adults have experienced stress in the workplace. This study specifies the pace of the modern world of work and achieving home/life balance as the key causes of this high level of stress felt by employees. The authors explicitly state that these figures mean more pressure on employers to provide support and assistance for their employees in the form of practical measures, and state that this is a necessity if employers wish to avoid 'impact on their performance and ultimately their long-term success'.

So what affects does stress at work have on both the individual and organisation?

There are many misconceptions surrounding stress. Few individuals or organisations may wish to admit that stress exists for them, for fear of appearing to be 'failing'. However, the cost to both an individual and organisation may be far greater if stress is left unchecked.

Cost to the individual

Stress manifests itself physically, mentally and emotionally in an individual. Those

who suffer from stress are liable to be more susceptible to infectious disease and will take longer to recover, thus they will be absent for periods from work, hence their productivity decreases and perhaps their esteem at work. Other symptoms include mental and emotional ill health, alcohol and drug problems, and numerous physical manifestations. Suffice it to say the affects upon an individual suffering stress may be great.

Costs to the organisation

It has traditionally been the responsibility of the individual to deal with his or her stress relating to work. However, under Health and Safety guidelines (1995), 'companies have a clear preventative duty to ensure their employees health'. Costs to the organisation include:

- Reduced availability of employees
- Poor productivity and decision making
- Poor cooperation and industrial relations (Cox, 1990)
- Costs of absenteeism and sickness (and potential legal action associated with these)
- Costs of staff turnover and recruitment (Marks & Hingley, 1991)

These are reinforced in a study published by the Health and Safety Executive in May 2000. This states that the way in which employers design working methods affects the mental and physical health of their employees and directly impacts upon absenteeism. This clearly demonstrates that an organisation is directly impacted upon by the health of its employees and costs here may also be great.

Costs to the economy

As previously noted, the estimated cost of absenteeism to the British economy is £13bn per annum. The Health and Safety Executive estimates that 60% of all work absences are stress related. Eight out of ten visits to GP's are believed to be stress related.

Other common work related illnesses, with which massage has a direct positive influence, are the prevalence of back problems and repetitive strain injuries. 1-2 million working days are lost every year due to musculoskeletal conditions such as these. RSI, which is now a measurable physical condition often attributed to the use of keyboards and poorly organised work stations, affects 200,000 people per year and is estimated to cost industry £400m per annum. Recent research claims that RSI and other musculo-skeletal disorders are now the primary causes of absenteeism, says the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. They found that half of all work related absences involve strains. Pace of work was found to be a significant risk factor, and MSDs are thought to be worsened by stress.

How can massage at work help combat the above?As previously discussed, massage at work enables an individual to experience a great many physiological benefits which boost the immune and circulatory systems, promoting good health. This helps prevent any stress on the body from taking a physiological hold through

increasing self-awareness of health and wellbeing in an individual. You can feel the difference in your body during and after a massage, and as a consequence, you are liable to try to maintain this feeling of calm and relaxation. At the same time you feel revitalised and energetic as described in the piece of research to follow. There is also the 'feel good factor' as previously discussed, which is an important part of the experience. An individual who receives a message feels nurtured and happy, and if they have received this benefit from their employer, they feel appreciated. An appreciated and stress free employee is productive and happy in their work!

Research on massage at work reinforces what individual employees report as described above.

A study by the Touch Institute at the University of Miami (1996) found that after five weeks a group of employees who had twice-weekly 15 minute massages in the office fared better than a control group of employees who were just told to close their eyes and relax in a chair for 15 minutes twice-weekly. The massaged group experienced reduced stress and improved performance, while the control group did not. The researchers used electroencephalograms (machine which measures brain activity) on the first and last days of the research to measure alpha and beta waves in both groups, and found massage recipients more alert. Stress hormones in the saliva of the massaged group were lower than the control group. The massaged workers completed maths problems in half the time as normal and with half the number of errors they had before they were massaged at each session. The maths skills of the control group did not improve. The massage recipients also reported feeling less fatigued and more clear headed.

Another study, again by the Touch Institute (1997), studied the effectiveness of 15-minute chair massages in reducing stress through measuring blood pressure. The participant's blood pressure was recorded before and after massage and analysis showed a significant reduction in patient's systolic and diastolic blood pressure after receiving the massage.

We are currently undertaking our own studies to further test the benefits of our service and these will make these available as soon as we can.