

# The burden of lower back pain

## Sound massage for a relaxed back

by Zeljko Vlahovic

We are all familiar with this story: the many challenges of our careers and everyday life proverbially rest on our shoulders; combine those with repetitive tasks and poor posture, and the result is an aching back. Statistics speak for themselves: one out of two Germans complains of occasional or chronic back pain. It is therefore no surprise that back symptoms are a frequent topic in the practice of sound massage.

### Sound massage therapy for back pain

There are many potential causes of back pain and, in any event, these should be medically evaluated prior to any therapy. Stress is a primary cause of back pain. As a study conducted by the European Professional Association for Sound Massage Therapy with more than 200 participants were able to show, regular sound massages promote positive ways to manage stress and increase the feeling of Wellbeing in and with your own body (Koller/Grotz, 2010). When dealing with stress-related symptoms, sound massage, as a holistic means of relaxation, is ideal for supporting traditional treatment methods and plays an especially important role in prevention. When applied by a trained professional, sound healing methods may also be used as targeted, independent interventions. Collaboration between the client/patient, sound massage practitioner, and the treating physicians, therapists, and other care team members is highly desired. Whether caused by stress or other factors, sound healing methods provide numerous approaches to therapy and are an ideal complement to holistic, integrated back treatment.

If you suffer from back pain, sound massage may:

- enable a sense of wellbeing
- induce relaxation
- affect the autonomic nervous system in the form of a parasympathetic response
- regulate muscle tension – especially striated musculature
- facilitate reduction of muscle tone in smooth muscles
- stimulate perfusion and lymph flow and thereby also metabolism
- relax connective tissue / fasciae
- reduce pain
- promote body image
- increase motivation

### Harmonic sounds and soft vibrations

The harmonic sounds of the singing bowls generally promote a state of soothing relaxation in a short period of time. The vibrations of the singing bowls spread out over bodily fluids, tissues, organs, and muscles, as well as cavities throughout the body. In comparison to a traditional massage, we are not working with "outside energy", but with very fine impulses that trigger resonances within the body – so that it begins to vibrate from the inside out. The soft oscillations function as soft, continuous vibrations in the area being treated. In this way, muscle tension can be reduced, perfusion and lymph flow are stimulated, and fasciae throughout the body are relaxed (compare Hardt, 2009). Consistent vibration leads to relaxation of striated muscle and also has a tension reducing effect on smooth muscle. This sometimes leads to surprisingly fast reduction in pain and overall regeneration of the body. This gentle mode of treatment supports the body's readiness and speed of development without surpassing limits or causing additional pain. This approach also reflects on of the central principles of the Peter Hess® sound healing methods: less is more! Experience indicates that sound massage can



photos: Anna Avramidou

*The harmonic sounds and rhythmic vibrations of the singing bowl are perceived as very soothing and gently relax tensions.*



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support our regulatory system for homeostasis, thus the natural impulse for the preservation of our internal systems. These trend towards their own "centre" and thereby towards being "well".

### **Reduce pain – enable regeneration**

In practice, regular sound massages have not only shown to play a significant role in prevention, but sound healing methods have also proven themselves in complementary applications, for instance preparatory measures prior to traditional treatment. Targeted collaboration between sound massage practitioner and, for example, physical therapist or ergo-therapist can be especially beneficial here. Through sound healing therapy, the client/patient is prepared for the actual treatment, so that its therapeutic effect is heightened. Those suffering from back pain repeatedly describe how soothing and relaxing a sound massage is for the back. "Problem areas" such as joints with restricted range of motion or muscular tightness often cause pain and allow only limited therapeutic treatment. Prior relaxation through sound therapy can enable loosening and there-

by reduce pain (compare Beutel, 2007), so that, for example, a traditional massage may then be carried out subsequently. Especially with chronic pain patients, "just a feeling of wellbeing" during a sound massage can be a key moment in their healing process. Particularly when considering that with its mechanically very gentle, subtle, stimuli through fine sound vibrations, a sound massage is a very good alternative to elements of a deep massage that often cannot be carried out. But healing sounds can also support perfusion-promoting and tension-reducing massage stimuli following a massage. A "regeneration" can develop, and the pleasant feeling is sustainably anchored through sound.

### **Positive feelings facilitate change**

Other symptoms associated with back pain include sleep disorders, fatigue, resignation, or even depression (compare Matzenberger, 2009). The pleasant, pain-free body experience during a sound session is a welcome counter position – and not just for chronic pain patients. Sounds promote relaxation usually within just a few minutes and trigger positive feelings like trust, comfort, or assurance.

When you consider that approx. 80% of patients treated for back pain suffer from "unspecified" back pain, in other words, the cause of their back pain cannot be clearly determined, the holistic effect of a sound massage becomes more significant. Mental and physical relaxation opens the way to "letting go" and "self-examination". You could say that with the help of healing sounds, the soul is able to unfold. Occasionally, something is "a pain in the neck", "oppress our shoulders", or "breaks our backs". With the aid of the healing sounds, we are ready to look inside and, and may understand from a higher point of view, what's the reason of our complaints. In this manner, targeted sound exercises can become part of a daily psychological regimen. They can help make

you aware of stressful situations or conduct, and thereby provide opportunity to avoid these and replace them with positive behavioural processes. This is the first step towards change. The sounds – for example associated with targeted affirmations – also support on the journey towards change. There is evidence that they have a positive impact on the motivation to do something for yourself (compare Erler, 2014), so that some patients regard their experience with sound therapy as the impulse to get involved in their own healing process and thereby improve their health in a sustainable manner (compare Krause, 2016). At the same time, the sounds are not only beneficial to the receiver, but also to the giver – because in the sound space all participants benefit!

*Standing in the XXL bowl, the sounds spread from the soles of our feet upward – they have a straightening and loosening effect. Ideal for self-application or preparation for therapy.*

*photo: Anna Avramidou*



