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Research confirms that some forms of massage help  
against low back pain

## But not all techniques live up to the promises made for them

**Cologne, 26 March 2010.** Most people have experienced back pain – and many hope that massage will relieve it. But not all forms of massage have been scientifically proven to help against low back pain. That is what the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) pointed out in information published on [informedhealthonline.org](http://www.informedhealthonline.org) (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.en.html>) today.

Back pain often affects the lower back and can be a big physical and psychological burden. “The cause of back pain is not always immediately clear,” explains Professor Peter Sawicki, the Institute’s Director. “But low back pain usually gets better on its own within a few weeks.” Back pain is only rarely caused by a more serious health problem.

## Classic massage, Thai massage and acupuncture could help against low back pain

If low back pain does not get better on its own, massage therapy could be a worthwhile option. “Research suggests that classic massage, Thai massage and acupuncture can relieve low back pain that has lasted longer than several weeks,” says the Institute’s Director. In classic (Swedish) massage the affected area of skin and muscles are massaged, in Thai massage the limbs are pulled and stretched, and acupuncture involves applying pressure to certain points on the body. “But relying on massage alone does not appear to be the best approach when it comes to back pain”, adds Sawicki. Research indicates that people could benefit more if they combine massages with exercises and stretching. In some trials this combination of approaches led to better pain relief and mobility compared to massage alone.

## Not all massages are the same

“Not all forms of massage have been scientifically proven to help against chronic back pain though,” concludes Sawicki. “So it is worth finding out about the different techniques before deciding to have a certain type of massage.” An overview of the most common forms of massage is now available on [informedhealthonline.org](http://www.informedhealthonline.org) (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.en.html>)

The Institute's website, [informedhealthonline.org](http://www.informedhealthonline.org) (URL:

<http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.en.html>), provides the public with easy-to-understand information about current medical developments and research on important health issues. If you would like to be kept up-to-date with the latest publications on the independent health information website, you can subscribe to the [informedhealthonline.org](http://www.informedhealthonline.org) newsletter (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.69.en.html>).

Contact: [information@iqwig.de](mailto:information@iqwig.de) (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/mailto:information@iqwig.de>)

## Information:

Low back pain: Can massage help? (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.630.en.html>)

Forms of massage at a glance (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.629.en.html>)

**Sources**

## **The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)**

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

## **Evidence basis of our health information**

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at [\*\*www.informedhealthonline.org\*\*](http://www.informedhealthonline.org)

## **Disclaimer**

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