

MASSAGE FOR BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS: presenting evidence and identifying opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

The literature highlights many advantages in the use of Massage Therapy (MT) by breast cancer patients, suggesting its value in long-term Treatment-Related Symptoms (TRS) management. Although MT has been shown to provide positive results in managing TRS, the studies conducted so far present a considerable number of gaps and are primarily focused on cancer population in treatment with less focus on survivors' population. ¹⁻³

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this study are to present evidence on MT as a TRS reduction strategy and its immune response-stimulating effects in breast cancer survivors, as well as to present the current gaps and limitations of research in this arena.

METHODS

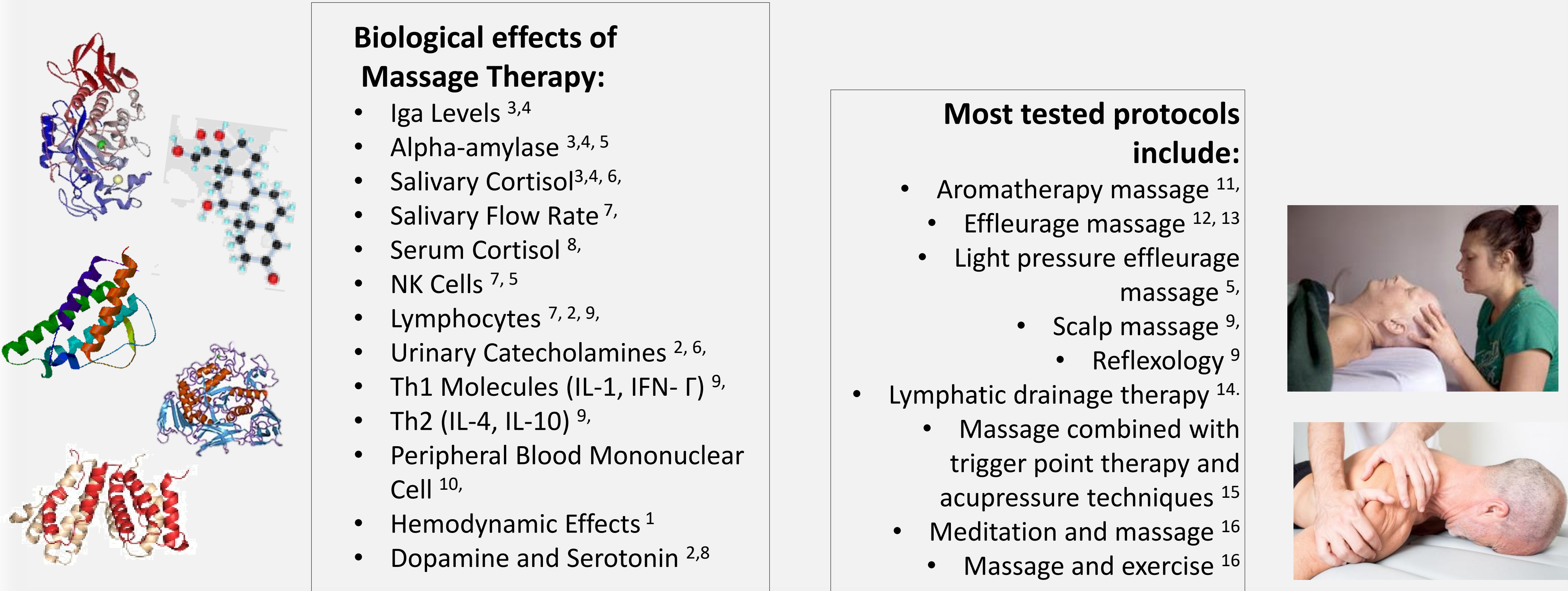
Design: A literature review was undertaken using the Evidence-Based Practice approach and the Psychoneuroimmunology model as the theoretical frameworks (Figure 1).

Databases: Databases: LILACS, EMBASE, CINAHL, PubMed and the Cochrane Library.

Criteria: Inclusion criteria were full-text articles available in English, Spanish or Portuguese and published in the last 20 years (1981-2016).

RESULTS

After selection, 12 clinical trials were retained for critical appraisal on methodological quality.



Although we do have some evidence to support the use of MT, limitations of previous studies include:

Specificity: there is a lacking of understanding on: (i) to whom and in what context each MT works (in which dose, for which phase of disease, in association with which type of conventional treatment and for how often), (ii) when they should be used (before, during or after a conventional treatment), (iii) and for how long (duration).

Focus on survivor population: preliminary evidence is not specifically focused on breast cancer survivors.

Biological effects: The few studies that have explored the biological effects of MT have not addressed the circadian rhythm of the biological markers investigated. ⁴⁻¹²

CONCLUSION

Overall, MT showed a positive impact on stress levels, low back pain, muscle pain, sleep, blood pressure, heart rate, inflammatory markers and mood improvement in cancer population.

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