

Rhythmical massage therapy according to Dr. med. Ita Wegman for long-COVID/post-vac syndrome

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The treatment concepts described below refer to the functional three- and fourfold structure of the human being with regard to the relevant symptoms (1). This approach was developed by Dr. med. Ita Wegman (1876-1943) for the anthroposophical extension of massage, whose understanding is based on the interaction of the essential limbs in relation to the nervous-sensory system, the rhythmic system and the metabolic-limb system. The various symptoms of a Long COVID disease can manifest themselves in all areas: in the respiratory, renal and cardiovascular systems, in the musculoskeletal system and in the neurological system.

In the following tabular overview, the symptoms characteristic of Long-COVID are set in relation to the functional tripartite structure of the human being, which makes the spectrum of possible applications of rhythmical massage therapy (RMT) visible:

Organ system	Neurosensory system	Rhythmic system	System of metabolism and limbs
Symptoms	Schmerzsyndrome: - sowohl N. trigeminus als auch N. olfactorius - Kopfschmerzen - Parästhesien - Bauchschmerzen Kognitive Einschränkungen Konzentrationsstörungen Sensorische Störungen Neuropathien Depression Schlafstörungen	dyspnea cardiac arrhythmia overload of the right ventricle high blood pressure phlegm	fatigue syndrome inflammatory factors movement restrictions myalgias arthralgias fascia adhesions depression lack of strenght feeling of coldness in legs, arms and trunk sleep disorders
Effect of Rhythmical Massage Therapy	- pain reduction - calming of overshooting body sensations - Restoration and "integration" of the limbs - Improvement of self-perception	- balancing and harmonization through drainage and organ treatments - special breathing techniques for phlegm congestion - mobilization of the trunk - warming through	- Aufbau- und Abbauprozesse im Ganzen sowie in den Strukturen des Bindegewebes anregen - Verklebungen lösen - Detonisierung der Muskulatur - Durchwärmung - Funktionelle Anregung der Organtätigkeiten durch spezielle Organeinreibungen

The quality of the massage techniques depends on the therapist's findings and the individual reaction of the patient's tissue and the individual reaction of the patient's tissue. Christa Maier-Schnorr has described the careful assessment of findings and the differentiation of rhythmic massage techniques for rhythmical massage therapy: from “binding and loosening” to the seven-limb structure according to the eurythmic evolutionary series (2, p. 97f.). In the following, we take a differentiated look at the “language of essential elements” in the palpation findings of the body tissue. The perceptions resulting from the palpation findings lead to individual objectives and procedures, the adaptation of the grip quality and a patient-centered structure of the treatment.

Treatment recommendations for rhythmical massage therapy for Long COVID

1. Relieving the rhythmic system (variant 1)

- **Treatment in supine position** for general tension reduction and to deepen the breath:
Loosening up the upper abdominal area slightly above and below the costal arch and special breathing techniques to support inhalation and exhalation.
Abdominal massages, calf massages and whole leg massages are integrated to deepen the breath and stimulate the circulation. The hip area – including the small of the back – can be made permeable with deep kneading of the soft tissue.
Liver and spleen embrocations accompany this series of treatments.
- **Strengthening the rhythmic system in the sense of building up**
After loosening up the upper abdomen, arm massages are performed downwards into the hand. This can later be followed by loosening up the entire chest wall at the front and back. To deepen the breathing, calf and foot treatments are alternated with upper arm and back massages with the entire lower back and hips.
Effect: stimulation in the sense of deepened inhalation.
- **Mobilization of the chest**
It serves to stimulate the vital forces in the metabolic-limb system and to promote the elasticity of the ribcage. Due to the tightness experienced in the chest and the anxiety that often results from this, we begin the treatment in the supine position by opening and warming the center of the body: initially dorsally, then continuing from dorsally to ventrally, holding the envelope flat and carefully expanding and accompanying the tissue. Lifting the rib cage may also be indicated. Warming the edge of the ribs and the flanks at the transition allows the breath to deepen. Many calm repetitions help the upper abdomen and diaphragm area to become more permeable.
Effect: The mobilization and warming up allows the breath to deepen. Many calm repetitions help to make the upper abdominal and diaphragm area more permeable.

The treatment examples mentioned serve to counteract sclerosing tendencies. The therapy consists of releasing the cramped astral body and loosening and opening up the drainage channels to the periphery and the limbs.

Margarethe Hauschka describes this basic concept in her massage book (3, p. 168). It is necessary to adapt the grip quality to the individual findings. Two articles by Charlotte Allmer and Kathrin Studer-Senn are recommended for a deeper understanding and procedure of rhythmical massage according to Wegman (4, 5).

2. Regulation of the neurosensory system in the sense of calming (variant 2)

The aims of RMT here is to calm the patient, regulate the build-up and breakdown processes and thus expand the chest cavity. If the patient is anxious due to a feeling of tightness in the chest, direct contact in the upper abdomen and diaphragm area is initially avoided.

- **Treatment begins in a sitting position**
relaxing, uprighting and warming back treatment is carried out up to the small of the back, which is concluded by breathing grips on the flanks with warming lemniscate. This is followed by an invigorating treatment of the shoulders and upper arms to stimulate breathing and relieve the heart, possibly combined with a soothing heart embrocation.
- **Arm treatment in the sense of build-up**
Localized arm treatment can be applied upwards to stimulate the restorative powers. Stimulating the restorative powers stimulates the activity in the body's senses. The associated body experience strengthens and improves self-regulation. One observation frequently made by the therapists was that the work had to be maintained in a sitting position for an unexpectedly long time, as lying down was experienced as uncomfortable by the patients or led to shortness of breath. However, frequent repetitions and a slow, careful increase in intensity enable positive development. Depending on the patient's exercise tolerance, the treatment concept of variant 1 can also be incorporated at a later stage.
Effect: Relieves the autonomic nervous system.

3. Warmth stimulation and sleep support with stimulation of the system of metabolism and limbs (variant 3)

The regulation and stimulation of the warmth organism is a central effectiveness of rhythmical massage therapy in relation to the viral disease with COVID. It stimulates warmth generation and warmth circulation to the extremities.

- **Treatment example in prone position**
The first step is a back treatment to warm up the root area with a broad back or shoulder treatment. The legs or arms can then be treated in the supine or prone position. The treatment includes abdominal massages and liver embrocations right from the start. The intensity is slowly increased.
- **Treatments to stimulate the sleep-wake rhythm**
Sleep is impaired in many people affected by COVID. In particular, the REM sleep phase (REM = rapid eye movement) is disturbed, which leads to frequent night-time awakenings and daytime tiredness. Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), which can occur as a result of a viral infection, is improved by treating sleep disorders (6). In order to restore and deepen the sleep-wake rhythm, a decision must be made depending on the findings as to whether incarnating, locally initiating back treatment with strong calf and foot treatments or rhythmic, warm arm-back treatment to improve the anabolic processes is indicated. The choice of treatment time depends on whether the quality should be more stimulating and invigorating (in the morning) or more stretching and calming (in the evening). A healthy body sensation increases the ability to relax and thus serves to deepen the sleep-wake rhythm. A kidney embrocation has a supportive effect.

4. Organ therapy

An essential part of RMT are the organ embrocations that can be carried out following treatment. As part of the Long COVID therapy, the heart, kidney and liver embrocations have proved particularly effective, and in special cases also the spleen and bladder embrocations (3, S. 146).

Evidence of effectiveness and substances used

The effectiveness of rhythmic massage therapy is confirmed by the exchange of experience between colleagues mentioned here. In a prospective exploratory cohort study in 2014, the following physiological effects of RMT were also demonstrated (7, p. 98): an immediate increase in the dorsal surface temperature of the patients as well as increased heart rate variability (HRV) and sympathetic stimulation. In the long term, RMT led to a gradual improvement in heat distribution and regulation of resting HRV. A summary of the study results from the publications of the working groups of Wälchli and Hamre (8, 9) can be found in the publication by Albertin and Härter (10, S. 39–41).

Possible substances that support the effect of rhythmical massage therapy were discussed in the experts' exchange of experiences. The following substances are examples for the treatment and follow-up treatment of viral infectious diseases and long-COVID symptoms: eucalyptus, ginger, copper, rosemary, thyme, arnica, betula/arnica, solum, prunus, primula, lemon balm, oxalis, rose, peat, camomile.

Note: A detailed specialist article on the clinical picture of long-COVID/post-vac syndrome from the perspective and treatment mandate of rhythmical massage therapy will be published by the above-mentioned authors in “Der Merkurstab” in 2024.

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