LEITA COWART / Special

Ginger Bunn, who is eight months pregnant, talks to massage therapist Xavier Johnson.

Helping hands

Therapeutic massage may reduce pain, illness and depression

By Pamela A. Keene
For Southside Medical

Therapeutic massage can help reduce stress, minimize labor pains and help with attention deficit disorders, according to research by the Touch Research Institutes of Miami. It also has shown a reduction in depression.

"The institute's research is extensive," said Xavier Johnson, founder of Johnson Touch Therapeutic, a massage practice in Jonesboro. "The research helps us focus on medically based massage, rather than wellness-based, and we like to work with doctors."

Johnson, who graduated from the Georgia Medical Institute with a degree in massage therapy, works with patients who have chronic problems or medical conditions. Research has shown, for example, that massage during pregnancy reduces related aches and pains.

"During pregnancy, we avoid certain areas — the Achilles' tendon, heels and the finger webs — because these areas are believed to induce labor," he said.

"Massage during labor tends to reduce the pain and shorten the labor."

Labor massage includes working with the lower back, hands, feet and calves.

"Calves tend to cramp, and massage helps," Johnson said. At certain stages of labor Johnson does cranial (head) massage.

"The goal is to try and relax the patient, and it can be very effective," he said.

For those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, cranial massage appears to relieve symptoms. The massage extends to the neck and shoulders.

"Young patients rated themselves happier and less fidgety after massage," he said. "Their teachers said that these students were more able to stay on task and be less hyperactive."

In addition to the immediate benefits of massage therapy, patients may be able to reduce their medication with a doctor's supervision, Johnson said.

The research reaches into many health areas, addressing issues ranging from depression and autism to carpal tunnel syndrome and pain during treatment for burns. Other studies show that training the elderly to massage infants was beneficial to the elderly, reducing loneliness, depression and stress.

Working with physicians, Johnson Touch Therapeutic offers deep-tissue massage, sports massage and neuromuscular massage.

On the first visit, a complete medical history is taken; then the massage therapist conducts an in-depth interview before treatment. Blood-pressure screening, a glucose test and [illegible]inalysis are part of the initial [illegible]

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