

# Sojourn Massage Newsletter

Fall 2009

Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## The Implications of Bodywork

### Human Touch Has Powerful Results

*Cathy Ulrich*

Whether in giving or receiving, touch is as essential to human survival as is food. Infants deprived of touch, even when they are getting adequate nutrition, will fail to thrive. Elders isolated by loss of partners and friends become depressed not only because of the absence of social interaction, but also because of the simple loss of physical contact.

We calm our pets by stroking them, we greet each other with a hug or a handshake, and we soothe our children by holding them. No other form of connection is as powerful and universal as touch. Taking a look at how this sensation is connected to the brain provides insight into the significance of bodywork.

because of our skin. Our skin tells us about our environment and ourselves. When we touch something with our fingers, we're not only sensing the object, we're also feeling our own skin, our own boundaries.

In the first few days of an embryo's life, the cells that eventually become a fully formed baby divide into three layers. The brain and skin come from the same layer, and they develop together, not only before birth, but well into the first year of life. When a baby is held, cuddled, and breast-fed, she's getting crucial stimulation to build neural connections between her skin and her brain that will ultimately last her entire lifetime.



No matter the age, human touch plays a significant role in mental and physical health.

### Skin and the Brain

The adult human lives inside an envelope of about 18 square feet of skin. Every inch houses thousands of nerve endings and various kinds of sensory receptors, all working to tell the brain about its surroundings. The cold of an ice cube, the softness of a cat's fur, a warm breeze, the caress of a loved one--all of these feelings are possible

Study after study has shown that touch is not only important for development, but is crucial to survival. James H.M. Knox of Johns Hopkins Hospital reported in 1915 that babies left in orphanages and given proper nutrition died at a rate of about 90 percent. Other studies of the same era confirmed

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*Live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip.*

-Will Rogers

#### Office Hours and Contact

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these findings and showed that those babies who did survive were often mentally handicapped and stunted in their growth. These valuable studies helped institutions understand the importance of touch. When staff was added to provide enough time for each child to be held, handled, and touched, mortality rates dropped dramatically.

## Massage for Children

Those early statistical studies showed how vital touch is to developing infants. Researchers are also finding that giving massage to premature infants can improve their growth and overall health. A study conducted by the Touch Research Institute (TRI) at the University of Miami found that when stable premature babies were given five, one-minute massages a day, they gained 47 percent more weight than their counterparts who didn't get massage.

A 2001 study conducted by TRI showed that when mothers gave their infants a 15-minute massage before bedtime, these sleep-challenged kids went to sleep more quickly and were more alert during daytime hours.

Conversely, clinical research and sociological studies link touch deprivation with aggression. A 2002 study reported that adolescents with a history of aggressive behavior showed less aggression and were less anxious after receiving a 20-minute massage twice a week for five weeks.

Massage also reduces the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder so kids can concentrate better, and it's even been found that the right kind of touch can help kids with autism relate better to teachers and family members.

## Massage for Adults

Ongoing research by the Touch Research Institute continues to prove that massage is an important therapy for many conditions. After a massage, levels of the stress hormone cortisol drop in saliva tests, examinations show an improvement in alertness and relaxation, depression scores decrease, and mental focus improves.

The exponential growth of the bodywork field is a testament to the value of safe, therapeutic touch. Of course bodywork

can play an essential role in the healing of specific chronic or acute orthopedic conditions, but it also serves as a powerful aide in improving the quality of life for adults.

Stan, a former client, was going through a nasty divorce. He had friends to support him emotionally, but it seemed that the thing he missed most was the nurturing touch of his partner. He credits weekly massage appointments, along with seeing a counselor, to his emotional recovery. Massage can be a healthy way to get that much-needed human contact.

## Massage for Elders

People confined to nursing homes rarely get more than daily hygienic care in terms of touch. Yet elders need touch as much as infants; studies show that when they receive regular massage, the elderly have less depression and anxiety,

experience better physical coordination, and show a decrease of stress hormone in their saliva.

Geriatric massage is a growing field requiring specialized training, and many massage therapists offer it in their practices. Some nursing homes now provide massage to their residents. Elders appear to respond as well to bodywork as, if not better than, their younger counterparts.

## Contact for All Ages

Before babies learn about their hands and feet, they need the touch of loved ones and caregivers. We retain that need our entire lives. Remember to savor touch the next time you're lying on a massage table. Your therapist is not only working out tight muscles, she's contacting your entire nervous system, calming you through pathways that were put in place before you were born.



Infant massage has shown great benefits in calming babies and helping pre-term infants thrive.

# Massage Ambiance is Key

## Is the Scene Conducive to Your Relaxation?

Nina McIntosh

Ever had a massage but couldn't fully enjoy it because the music was too fast, or the aromatherapy was not to your liking, or outside noise was disruptive? Whatever the issue, feel comfortable knowing that your massage therapist wants you to express your feelings.

The quality of communication between the practitioner and the client is key. By all means, you should speak up about anything that diminishes your enjoyment of, or ability to focus on, your session, no matter whether the problem is the therapist's office or her/his behavior. It's your session, and you have the right to an environment that supports your relaxation.

Having said that, it's not always easy to assert yourself while lying naked on a table. However, your practitioner is a professional and is open to, even seeking, feedback. If you are bothered, others probably are too. Your practitioner wants and needs to know and would much prefer you mentioning it than choosing to not come back again.

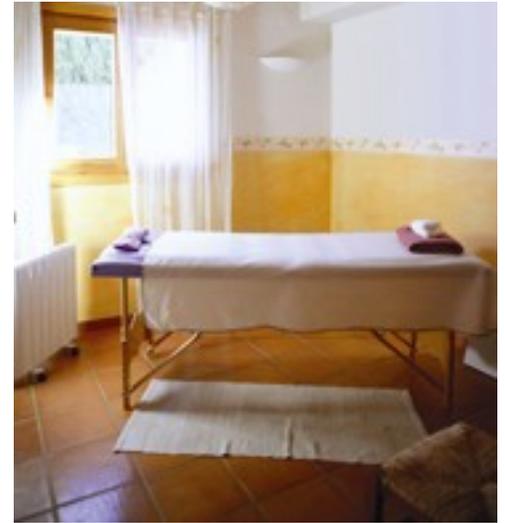
And you may learn something as well. Perhaps that lavender oil you thought was too strong actually helps relaxation and will work wonders for you in a more diluted form. Or maybe the exterior noise is a problem only on Monday evenings, and you can be sure to avoid booking your appointment then.

### FIXING THE PROBLEM

The situation may be something easy to remedy, like changing the music or essential oils. But if it's something more complex, like exterior noise from officemates, your practitioner may need time to address the situation.

View the situation as an opportunity to provide important, constructive feedback about the services offered as well a chance to enhance the therapeutic relationship between you and your massage practitioner.

Your massage session is about you. Take responsibility for communicating your needs, and your session will be all the more healing for it.



Communicating your needs is key.

# Hot or Cold for Injuries?

## How to Know Which is Best for You

Art Riggs

We all know that treating an injury immediately after it happens can help minimize the pain and damage as well as facilitate recovery. But after rolling your ankle in a soccer game, or hurting your back when lifting your toddler, or tweaking your knee when stepping out of your car, what's best? Should you ice it to try to control inflammation, or would heat be better to promote circulation?

While it's difficult to establish a fail-safe rule for when to apply ice or heat, the general directive is to use ice for the first forty-eight to seventy-two hours after an acute injury and then switch to heat.

### It Depends

The reality is that many conditions are not necessarily the result of a specific

injury. I call these conditions "recurrent acute" and find them by far the most common: sciatica that occurs when you drive a car; a back that flare up every time you garden; or tennis elbow from intense computer work. In these cases, consistent and frequent applications of ice may prove very helpful over long periods of time, particularly immediately after experiencing the event that causes problems.

Conversely, back or other muscle spasms caused by overexertion rather than injury may benefit greatly from heat immediately upon the onset of symptoms or immediately after exercise in order to relax the muscles and increase circulation. Also, muscle belly pain not resulting from acute and

serious trauma generally responds well to heat, which can break the spasms and release the strain. On the other hand, nerve and tendon pain--regardless of the duration of symptoms, even if you've been experience them for months--benefit from ice.

### What Works for You

The bottom line: different individuals will constitutionally vary greatly in their reactions. Some people are more prone to the types of inflammation exacerbated by heat, while others find their bodies contracting and tightening at the mere mention of ice. Try each option and pay close attention to how your body and mind respond, and let your gut be your guide. Ultimately, what works best for you is, well, what's best for you.

*Whatever words  
we utter should  
be chosen with  
care, for people  
will hear them  
and be  
influenced by  
them, for good  
or ill.*

-Buddha

Well, Fall is upon us again and as the season changes, it is inspiration to make some changes for yourself.

I have made some changes here at Sojourn....

I have updated my website with a new look and more information for you, I have added some new therapies (more to come) and be on the lookout for a survey about Sojourn Massage.

Let me know what you think about these changes!

Enjoy this season's Newsletter.

As always I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,  
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