

In the Balance

Massage news and tips for your good health

Sojourn Therapeutic Massage

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Summer Issue

stress relief

reduced muscle tension

pain relief

more restful sleep

improved circulation

healthier joints

improved posture

quicker recovery from illness and injury

fewer headaches

restored humor

increased energy

improved outlook on life

The power of touch

Touch is vital to development, coping with stress

“Tactile stimulation appears to be a fundamentally necessary experience for the healthy behavioral development of the individual. There are significant biochemical differences between humans who have enjoyed adequate tactile stimulation and those who have not.”

-Ashley Montagu, *Touch: The Human Significance of the Skin.*

Studies by the Touch Research Institute of the University of Miami Medical School have demonstrated that premature babies who were massaged gained more weight, were more active and alert, and stayed in the hospital fewer days than infants who weren't massaged. The results were the same with babies of cocaine-addicted mothers. In fact, it is now understood that most drug-exposed babies, including those with fetal alcohol syndrome, are capable of leading normal lives *if raised in a nurturing environment that includes loving touch.* And massage not only helps stressed or ill babies. In another study infants who received massage from a parent before bedtime experienced better sleep patterns and less difficulty falling asleep.

Benefits both giver and receiver

The Touch Research Institute grandparent study is particularly remarkable in showing that caring touch is so powerful that it positively benefits both giver and receiver. When volunteer grandparents went into the hospital nursery to massage babies, the babies responded with enjoyment and increased weight gain. The surprising result was that the *grandparents'* depression and stress hormone levels decreased significantly as well.

Massage, a special kind of touch

For the rest of us, the nurturing touch of massage has been demonstrated to decrease the effects of stress overload, increase immunity, and relieve pain. Every day, massage is helping people recover from injuries, cope with arthritis and cancer, and, perhaps most importantly, enjoy a pleasurable, nourishing connection with another human being. ~

Massage therapists provide hospital care

Nurturing touch in the high-tech environment



Comforting touch by massage therapists is becoming more available in hospitals and other care facilities.



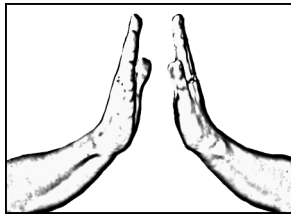
Caring touch benefits both elders and children, those giving as well as receiving.

Nurses once comforted patients with nurturing touch. These days nurses are busy with high-tech developments and complex paper work, and often have little time to touch patients for comfort.

Laura Koch, founder of the Hospital-Based Massage Network, says, “...massage therapists are often seen as playing the role of bringing caring touch back into today's highly technical and mechanized hospital environment.” ~

Healing energy

Feel it in your hands



To experiment with the “healing energy” of touch, try this exercise. Sit comfortably with your feet on the ground. Then bring your palms together until they are about 1/4 inch apart. Bring them back until they are 2 inches apart and then back together. Again separate them until they are about 4 inches apart. Repeat the process until they are 8 to 10 inches apart. Then, slowly return to the starting position, feeling for the “energy field” every 2 inches. You might feel a sense of resistance, bounciness, heat, tingling, or other sensations.

If you don’t feel much, vigorously rub your flat palms together for 15-30 seconds, and try again. What did you sense?

Now try it with a partner

If you like, try it with a friend or family member. Stand facing each other several feet apart. Extend your palms the full length of your arms. Move forward or backward so that your open palms meet each other. Now draw your palms back, about a foot from your chest. Close your eyes, and, very slowly, and at the same time, bring your palms toward one another’s. Pay careful attention to testing the field between you for resistance, heat, tingling, or any other sensations. Keep your eyes closed until your palms meet. What was this like?

This kind of aware sensitivity has been used by humans throughout history in healing touch. You, too, can use the power of touch to help your loved ones in need. ~



If someone you know is ill

Soothing touch can provide connection *and* relieve pain



Giving a gentle massage to an ailing family member can help relieve pain and anxiety.

Caring touch can be a blessing for someone who is very ill or frail. Being in that condition almost always means the loss of control over one’s life and can leave a person feeling quite alone and disconnected. Touch given by someone who cares can help meet the need for human involvement and provide an antidote to the needle-pricks, prodding and poking of medical procedures. Pain and anxiety may fall away as a person shifts his or her focus to the simple pleasure of soothing touch. Simple massage moves can even help relieve pain when medication has reached its limitations.

If someone you care about is ill, try sitting by him or her with an open heart and soft, willing hands. Have

your loved one direct you to an area that feels tense or painful. Place your hands there, and direct soothing pressure for some minutes before moving to another uncomfortable spot. Place a hand on either side of the head to help ease a headache. Massage the palm of the hands or the feet to achieve relaxation throughout the body. Just remember to be responsive to your loved one’s changing needs. Let him or her guide what you do. Even if all she or he can tolerate is holding hands, be assured that this simple act is very powerful.

If needed, a massage therapist can be called on for more specialized techniques for relieving discomfort and anxiety. ~



Shiatsu, reflexology, deep tissue—will they hurt?

Massage therapists adapt techniques to meet your needs

You may have heard that certain bodywork techniques are painful—Shiatsu, reflexology, trigger point therapy, and deep tissue massage to name a few.

The truth is, pressure is easily adjusted and can be firm without causing a lot of pain. Sometimes people say that the pressure of a particular technique “hurts good.” And you may be surprised by how much pressure can be applied comfortably as muscles and other tissues relax and become more pliable. The goal is always to work within your tolerance level.

Deep tissue massage may cause some initial discomfort which should lessen as tight areas are released and circulation increases.



Deep tissue and trigger point work

These two techniques are often used to treat chronic pain or injuries and may at first cause some discomfort. The benefits, however, almost always outweigh any twinges or pangs. Two ways to reduce pain are the slow and gradual increase of pressure and the use of ice on trigger points and areas of injury.



Practitioners work in ways to minimize discomfort when reflex points are worked on the feet.

Reflexology

When specific points on your feet are pressed in reflexology, there may be some initial tenderness, but practitioners know how to work in ways that minimize discomfort.

Shiatsu techniques can be modified as pressure is applied to the meridian channels.



Shiatsu

Shiatsu involves working points on energy pathways all over the body as well as stretching muscles and joints in slow and relaxed movements. If the pressure or stretches are uncomfortable for you, the techniques can be modified.

The key is communication

Be sure to talk about what you're feeling if you are uncomfortable in any way. We therapists always work most effectively when you tell us what you are experiencing.

Ask about these and any other techniques you've heard about. It's possible you would benefit from one of the many techniques in the massage therapist “bag of tricks.” ~

How others touch us and how we reach out to touch others creates an internal chemistry that speaks directly to every cell.

—Bernie Siegel, MD

Massage your feet

Boy, does that feel good!

Sit in a chair with your foot resting over the other knee, or on the floor cross-legged with one foot in front. Grasp the foot and pull the the foot front to back and side to side. Then press and slide your thumb down sections of the foot, from the base of the toes to the heel, while you brace it with your other hand. Squeeze each toe. Finish by squeezing and releasing several times from the heel to the toes. Then repeat on your other foot.



Your newsletter on massage! See inside:

- Studies prove power of touch
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- Touch for the seriously ill
- Shiatsu, reflexology, deep tissue
- Massage your feet

WE ALL NEED
CARING AND
HEALING TOUCH.



GIVE THE GIFT OF
MASSAGE!

Touch and stress

Help for learning new habits of calm and trust

Stress has become widely recognized as a culprit in contributing to a range of physical and emotional conditions, including difficult and incomplete recovery from major trauma.

Deane Juhan, author of *Job's Body: A Handbook for Bodywork*, and chair of the anatomy and physiology department of the Trager Institute, explains further. "Often ... frustrations, shocks, pains, and limitations become chronic and degenerative if they are not dealt with effectively. And since there are no germs, genes, or obvious continued traumas to define their action and cure, there is very little in the technical, surgical, or pharmaceutical repertoires with which to successfully address them."

Most people cannot consciously will their bodies to release stored tension. To do so demands the development of new habits, new attitudes and new ways of relating to the mind and body.

Touch can help us make that transition. Although we may not learn to let stress flow off our shoulders overnight, caring touch can help us feel calmer, gain trust, and become more motivated to take better care of ourselves. ~

