

What Massage Can Do For You

Beyond Pain Relief, Massage is Valuable for Preventive Care

Karrie Osborn

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Whether it is an aching back, recovery from an injury, a case of carpal tunnel syndrome, or a host of other debilitating physiological conditions, there's no doubt massage and bodywork works to relieve pain. But once your therapist has helped you tackle your pain, do you quit calling? When the pain is gone, are you gone, too?

Massage therapy is highly effective for pain relief, but it is an amazing preventive therapy as well. Massage helps build and maintain a healthy body (and mind), it combats stress, and it works to

Massage can play an important role in a good health-care regimen. Just as you eat healthily, exercise regularly, and take your vitamins to ward off illness and maintain a fit body, you should consider making frequent massage a part of your wellness lifestyle.

According to Benny Vaughn, a sports massage expert in Fort Worth, Texas, one of the benefits of consistent and regular massage therapy is better flexibility. "This happens because regular and structured touch stimulus enhances the nervous system's sensory and spatial processing capacity," he says. "That is, the person becomes more aware of her body's movement in space and becomes more aware of tightness or

*Be happy for
this moment.
This moment is
your life.*

-Omar Khayyam



Massage helps you maintain a healthy body.

keep the immune system strong. In short, massage can keep on working for you, even after the pain is gone.

MASSAGE FOR WELLNESS

If it's been a while since you booked your last massage--because your pain is no longer an issue or your injury is fully rehabbed--you might want to consider massage for preventive care.

pain long before it reaches a critical point of mechanical dysfunction."

As a preventive measure, frequent massage puts you more in tune with your body. "The consistency of massage therapy over time creates a cumulative stress-reduction effect," Vaughn says.

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Office Hours and Contact

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"The person becomes acutely aware of stress within her body long before it can create stress-driven damage."

And the more massage you receive, the more benefits you reap. "Massage therapists know that people who get massage regularly demonstrate greater improvement and notice a reduction in pain and muscular tension, as well as an improvement in posture," says Anne Williams, author of *Massage Mastery: From Student to Professional* (Lippincott Williams Wilkins, 2012).

"People regularly make a commitment to fitness," Williams says. "People regularly make a commitment to changing their diet. The difference they'd experience if they regularly made a commitment to massage is mind-blowing."

STRESS IS A KILLER

Stress is more than just a word we throw around to describe the nature of our hectic day. Today, we understand that stress kills.

According to the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, 60-90 percent of all US medical visits are for stress-related disorders. Chronic pain, headaches, heart disease, hypertension, and ulcers can all be wrought from stress. Many would argue that the best benefit of massage is its ability to reduce the stress in our lives.

From the perspective of daily living, think about the stress you felt at today's meeting--now it's hiding in your neck. Tomorrow that can turn into stiffness and eventually begin to affect other parts of your body. If you see your massage therapist for your regular session this week, the chances are good you won't reach the tipping point. Think of massage and bodywork as a way to rebalance your body.

Noted researcher Tiffany Field and her colleagues from the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine report that massage causes positive biological changes when it comes to stress. Through the course of more than 20 studies, these scientists found that massage decreases cortisol (a stress-derived hormone that negatively affects immune function and kills our immune cells) and increases dopamine

and serotonin (the neurotransmitters most associated with emotional well-being).

Add to this the research that shows massage can lower your heart rate and decrease your blood pressure, and you have a mighty effective, nonpharmacological, stress-fighting tool that's about as natural as natural can get.

A ONE-HOUR VACATION AND SO MUCH MORE

You may no longer need to rehab that knee or work the scar tissue from your surgery, but don't forget about everything else massage can do for you. Massage is the entire package, helping to heal body, mind, and spirit. Think of it as a one-hour vacation with amazing return on investment.

Whether it be maintaining joint

flexibility, managing blood pressure, or enhancing immunity, massage works. From repair to relief and from recovery to relaxation, massage is a magnificent piece of natural medicine you should always have as part of your health-care routine.

Karrie Osborn is senior editor for Body Sense. Contact her at karrie@abmp.com.



Regular massage helps reduce stress and improve your quality of life.

Stay Hydrated

Jennie Hastings Stancu

Has your therapist told you about the importance of drinking water?

After all, our bodies are composed of approximately 60 percent water, and all of our bodily functions are sustained by water. Dehydration is one of the most common detriments to our health, and one of the easiest problems to fix. Make staying hydrated simple and seamlessly interwoven throughout your day.

START EACH DAY OFF RIGHT

Start your morning with a tall, room-temperature glass of water with lemon squeezed into it, before you start taking any tea, coffee, or food. Front-loading hydration is helpful to the body. And be luxurious with your water--for a special treat, add mint, cucumber, or lemon.

HALF YOUR WEIGHT

It is difficult to know how much water is enough. One rule of thumb is to take half your body weight in pounds, and drink that many ounces of water per day.

So if you weigh 150 pounds, this would equal 75 ounces of water. For many of us, however, this might not be enough. If you are working hard, or you live in a particularly dry climate, you might need to drink even more than this.

WHAT ABOUT BPA?

You've probably seen the phrase "BPA free" on water bottles, and you may want to gravitate toward these. BPA stands for bisphenol A, which is a chemical found in polycarbonate plastics and epoxy resins.

According to Mayoclinic.org, some research has shown BPA can seep from a container into foods and beverages, and this is concerning because of possible health effects BPA has on the brain and behavior. Look for non-plastic bottles, or look for the "BPA free" logo.

OTHER DRINKS

Drinking herbal tea is a good way to stay hydrated. You can also augment your hydration with electrolyte-fortified water or sports drinks. However, be

aware that a lot of these drinks have incredibly high levels of sugar in them. Hydration isn't a healthy habit if you drink a day's worth of sugar in every glass. So check the label before you buy.

Jennie Hastings Stancu is a licensed massage therapist and author.



Stay hydrated to keep your body functioning optimally

Sleep and Your Skin

Shelley Burns

We have all encountered a sleepless night or two. Upon waking, we look in the mirror and are traumatized by what we see: puffy eyes, dark circles, droopy eyelids, and sallow skin. To add insult to injury, more wrinkles may be visible due to tossing and turning. Poor sleep for a prolonged time is a recipe for disaster.

There are three hormones affected when we don't get adequate amounts of sleep. These are cortisol, growth hormone, and melatonin, and they all have a direct effect on how our skin ages.

CORTISOL

is our stress response hormone. When we are not sleeping well, we're like a battery that does not have the chance to recharge. Our body identifies this as a stressful situation and starts producing cortisol. Like a jolt of caffeine, this spike in cortisol keeps us moving, but at

a cost. Elevated cortisol levels break down collagen, resulting in less skin elasticity.

GROWTH HORMONE

is responsible for building muscle, bone, and tissue--including skin. It is one of our antiaging hormones that replenishes as we sleep, rehydrating the skin and allowing for cellular repair.

MELATONIN

is our sleep hormone, and it also plays a role in the immune system. It is a significant contributor to the functional and physical integrity of our skin.

Without quality sleep, growth hormone and melatonin are not produced in sufficient quantities, while cortisol is overproduced. The result is overall poor skin condition, including dryness, dullness, fine lines, and wrinkles.

Even how you position your face on your pillow affects your skin. Sleeping on your back will avoid the risk of "sleep lines."

While there are some over-the-counter supplements to remedy sleeplessness, it's far better to eat well, exercise regularly, and develop healthy sleep habits (at least seven uninterrupted hours every night) to let the body regulate its hormones in a natural way. And don't forget to schedule your massage!

Shelley Burns, a doctor of naturopathic medicine, completed studies at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, and has certification in complementary and integrative medicine from Harvard University.

*Try to be a
rainbow in
someone's cloud.*

-Maya Angelou

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Massage Therapy provides many benefits including:

- Relaxation
- Improved circulation
- Reduced pain
- Decreased anxiety
- Improved sleep quality
- Improved muscle tone
- Increased energy
- Improved concentration

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