

Massage Therapy at the YMCA

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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

*Whoever is
happy will
make others
happy too.*

-Mark Twain



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.

Continued on page 2

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In this Issue

**What Massage Can Do For You
Stay Hydrated
High Time for Tea**

Continued from page 1

"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

High Time for Tea

Discover the Healing Properties of Taking Tea

The health research is enough to make you forego the latte for strong brewed tea instead. Name your color -- black, white, green, even red -- teas are packed with disease-preventing antioxidants (more than some fruits and vegetables) and contain vitamins, minerals, and at least half the caffeine of coffee.

Fortified with free radical-fighting polyphenols, tea drinkers have a reduced risk of many different cancers, in particular stomach, colorectal, and even skin cancer. Tea drinkers also have a lower risk of heart disease, stroke, and high cholesterol. Containing anti-inflammatory and arthritis-preventing properties, tea also helps stimulate the immune system and protect the liver against toxins.

But you have to drink up. Most research

points to five or so cups of brewed tea each day to reap the health benefits. Decaf tea loses some but not much of its health punch, due to extra processing.

All traditional tea -- white, green, oolong, and black -- is derived from the leaves of an evergreen tree called the *Camellia sinensis*, and all contain the health-promoting polyphenols. White tea is made from young tea leaves, dried in the sun without fermentation or processing. Green tea is dried with hot air after picking, so it retains its color but is not fermented. Oolong tea, sometimes referred to as "brown" tea, is fermented but not processed to the point of black tea. Black tea, on the other hand, is fully fermented, which accounts for the color of the leaves and its stronger flavor.

Rooibos, or red tea, is naturally caffeine-free and from the *Aspalathus linearis*, a shrub that grows only at high altitude near Cape of Good Hope in South Africa.

Herbal teas are made from a variety of plants, roots, bark, seeds, and flowers and are technically herbal infusions rather than tea. Though they don't contain the same antioxidants and haven't received the same research-based accolades as traditional tea, the herbs in these infusions have certain healing properties that have been used for centuries to treat many common health issues.

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

-Maya Angelou

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