

Massage and the Mind Body Continuum

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*Written for the book, **Welcome to Your Mind Body**, by Rudy Kachmann, MD, of the Kachmann Mind Body Institute, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

Does your back have pain? Neck stiff? Head ache? Knees or lower leg muscles not quite right? Maybe, like most people, you don't notice muscles and joints until they are a source of pain or they limit your activities. Stressed, over-worked individuals keeping up with families, career, school often set themselves towards goals with steely determination and don't stop until they have to. This is a pattern in many lives today, a pattern that is reflected in steely muscles and joints, chronic pain, diminished immune systems, and a general state of stress. Over time such problems can turn into physical ailments if not addressed. Fortunately, therapeutic massage is increasingly available. It can relieve pain, release stress and anxiety, and help in the repair and recovery of muscles and joints. It stimulates the body's internal systems to support improved immune function as well as overall health and well-being. Massage is an ancient healing method being proven by modern research.

The amount of research grows by leaps and bounds and reflects both the wide spectrum of applications for therapeutic massage, as well as its increasing inclusion with other treatment forms. According to recent statistics from the American Massage Therapy Association, the number of hospitals offering massage has increased by more than 33% in the past two years. Of those hospitals, 71% offer massage for stress relief and comfort, 67% for pain management, and 52% for cancer patients. Hospitals are also using massage therapy to improve mobility and movement, for pregnancy, edema, infant care, pre and post-operative care, hospice, and in conjunction with physical therapy.

Why is massage so important? The innovative research of Dr. Candace Pert, who identified receptor sites, neuropeptides and the communication network between the brain, nerves and other parts of the body, helps us understand why massage is effective. Massage typically uses hands-on rubbing, squeezing, pressing and otherwise manipulating muscle tissue and joints using varying degrees of pressure, with or without joint movement. The skin, the body's largest organ, has over 5 million receptor sites sending signals to the brain. The manipulation of muscles in massage activates this immense communication network triggering a vast chain reaction from the brain throughout all the systems. It involves millions of cells, glands, hormones and other chemicals, organs, blood and neural pathways, intestines . . . you name it! Figuratively speaking, it fires up neurotransmitters like 4th of July fireworks, or a complex computer network sending up a rocket ship. Unlike computers, the body has the distinct advantage of a self-healing or self-regulating capacity.

The results of this flurry of internal activity are as diverse as the individuals receiving massage. Research has shown benefits such as boosting the immune system; reducing blood pressure in stroke patients; easing post-operative pain; easing alcohol withdrawal symptoms; relief of pain, fatigue, stress, anxiety, nausea and depression in cancer patients; and long-lasting soothing for chronic back pain. Massage is the treatment of choice for back pain, surpassing all other complementary therapies. Muscle spasms and pain in post-heart bypass surgery were

reduced in patients treated at the hospital after surgery. Patients were so pleased 60% were willing to pay for treatment themselves.

The efficacy of therapeutic massage is further shown by its ability to improve blood circulation and lymph flow, improve oxygenation, flush cell waste, decrease heart rate and blood pressure, increase body heat and tissue respiration, reduce excess cortisol, which is produced by very high stress levels. (Excess cortisol destroys the body's killer cells thus diminishing one of the immune system's important lines of defense.) Massage can rebalance excess or inadequate energy flow. It helps pre-term infants gain weight, and affection-deprived infants develop. The late Ashley Montagu PhD, renowned anthropologist and considered the father of massage, found that stubborn eczema healed when mothers spent time massaging their babies.

In addition to its many direct benefits, massage is being used increasingly in collaboration with movement therapies, chiropractic, osteopathy, physical and occupational therapies, and in dental offices. Chair massage can be found in airports, offices, especially accounting offices at tax time. Massage can help clear and still the mind. Dr. Tiffany Fields of the Touch Research Institute of Miami University has shown the calculation of math problems takes half as long with double the accuracy after 9 consecutive days of 15-minute chair massage. Therapeutic massage can also be an excellent adjunct to psychotherapy and can help enhance self-image, self-esteem and self-empowerment while helping to release unwanted emotions stored in the body.

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