In Touch with the Benefits of Massage

Massage may be the oldest and simplest form of medical care. References to it date back thousands of years; it appears in writings from ancient China, Japan, India, Arabic nations, Greece, and Rome.

Even Hippocrates, the father of western medicine, had a comment on the subject in the 5th century B.C.: “The physician must be experienced in many things but assuredly in rubbing, for rubbing can bend a joint that is too loose and loosen a joint that is too rigid.”

Although it fell out of favor in the United States in the 30s and 40s, interest in massage was revived in the 70s. Today it is offered in hospitals, clinics, businesses, and even airports.

Massage is generally considered part of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and is increasingly offered along with standard treatment for a wide range of medical conditions: stress relief, managing depression and anxiety, pain, stiffness, blood pressure control, infant growth, sports-related injuries, and boosting immunity.

There are few serious risks to massage therapy when it is performed by a trained therapist, but massage isn’t appropriate for everyone. Talk with your doctor first if you have unexplained pain, burns or open wounds, cancer, blood clots, fractures, rheumatoid arthritis, severe osteoporosis, or if you are pregnant. To find a therapist, ask your health care provider or someone else you trust to make a recommendation.

A soothing massage is more than just a way to pamper yourself. It is also a tool to help you take control of your health and well-being -- in the most delightful of ways.

July 18 - 24: Everybody Deserves Massage Week

Prayer: Please keep me mindful of the power of caring touch. God of all hearts, may my touch be gentle and offer comfort and healing to those I meet. Amen.

Research about Massage

Scientific research on massage therapy is limited but growing and supports the general conclusion that massage therapy is effective. Here are some interesting recent studies about this age-old treatment:

Chronic Back Pain: A 2008 review found evidence that massage may be useful for chronic low-back pain. Clinical practice guidelines now recommend that physicians consider massage when patients with chronic low-back pain do not respond to conventional treatment.

Hospice Patients with Advanced Cancer: A recent, multi-site study of more than 300 hospice patients with advanced cancer concluded that massage may help relieve pain and improve mood for them.

Pre-term Infants: After two decades of research, experts have concluded that massaging stable, pre-term infants leads to greater weight gains. In a 2010 study, massaged infants experienced a 21% greater weight gain per day.

Sports Massages: When two thousand boxers had inter-bout massages, they felt significantly more recovered. In their second bouts, they didn’t punch any harder after a massage than after passive rest, but they felt less tired.

Breast Cancer Patients: Anxiety was significantly reduced in these patients after 30 minute aromatherapy massage twice a week for 4 weeks, making it a viable complementary therapy for such patients.

Yes, massage feels luxurious, but evidence is mounting that it also brings health and wellness benefits we can enjoy.

- advocatehealth.com
- healthyfamily.org
- amtamassage.org (The American Massage Therapy Association)
- massagetherapyfoundation.org

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