

# GENERAL BENEFITS OF MASSAGE

## WHAT CAN MASSAGE DO FOR YOU??

The body can produce an unhealthy buildup of hormones when we're stuck in traffic or meeting a work deadline. Pent-up levels of the "stress hormone", cortisol, can lead to sleeplessness, headaches and even digestive problems. Massage has been shown to decrease cortisol in the body. This allows the body to enter a relaxing rest-and-recovery mode: an effect that lingers long after the massage is over. In fact, massage triggers a host of brain chemistry responses that can result in lasting feelings of relaxation, lowered stress and improved mood. We've all suffered from the soreness associated with an overly exuberant exercise session. But did you know that most Americans experience neck, back and muscle pain from another less-strenuous activity? Surprisingly, it's sitting.

Chronic back pain, which is the second most common cause of disability and a top reason for missing work, can be the result of improper posture while sitting and standing. Additionally, carrying extra weight, poor posture, and repetitive or overuse movements can put strain on the back and other sensitive areas. This strain often results in spasms, tense muscles and pain in your upper back, hips, gluts and hamstrings. So the question is: what relaxes muscles? Massage gets to the root of the pain by relaxing tense muscles and increasing flexibility. Massage also encourages blood flow to the affected muscles, which can bring increase oxygen and nutrients. All of this activity reduces swelling and stiffness and increases flexibility to help eliminate pain. Muscular therapy also releases endorphins and boosts your levels of serotonin and dopamine, all hormones your body produces to help you feel good, promote healing and pain management, and calm your nerves.

### How will you feel afterwards?

Overall your massage can be a relaxing and enjoyable experience depending on your reason for the visit. Massage can affect people in many ways. Generally you will experience an increased feeling of well-being. You may feel...

- **Sleepy**, often a massage relaxes you so much you may just want to sleep.
- **Light headed/spacey**: Massage can trigger the release of endorphins, brain chemicals that induce the 'high' you may experience following a thorough treatment. This feeling can also be the result of toxins being released into the blood stream.
- **Tender/soreness**: Some discomfort following a treatment is often the muscles reacting to being loosened up. Just as we tend to complain, our muscles can also feel a bit painful having to go back to work again. It is often the case that the areas of the most tension may also be painful. This is due to the existing irritation of the tissues and will dissipate as the tension does. It is nice to do as little as possible following the treatment to allow the body time to adjust. Drink some water for hydration and expelling the toxins. It can take up to three days to feel the full effect of a treatment though improvement should be felt immediately. **Massage Tip**: Deep Tissue Massage focuses on deeper tissue structures with intense pressure to release chronic muscle tension and ultimately relax the body. Deep Tissue Massage is not relaxing and is often painful during and for a few days after, be sure to drink plenty of water!

### How often should you receive treatment?

Receiving regular massage treatment is like getting your car serviced, it keeps it in optimum working condition. In this way massage can also work as a preventative treatment. Remedial Massage Therapy does work, but not like magic. If a problem has been building up over months or years it is unlikely (but not impossible) that it will disappear completely in one treatment. It may be the case that weekly visits are needed initially to bring the problem to a manageable condition. Then biweekly or monthly 'maintenance' visits may be desirable. Of course, if the problem is not treatable with massage the appropriate health professional will be referred to you.

### Massage Therapy Helps Lift Depression and Lowers Anxiety

Taking time for massage is as important for people dealing with depression as it is for people dealing with arthritis, sports injuries and carpal tunnel syndrome. WebMD reviewed more than a dozen studies that revealed how massage can fight depression by lowering cortisol levels. Cortisol is the body's response to stress, and massage therapy lowers it by as much as 50%. At the same time, massage also can increase the levels of serotonin and dopamine, which are both neurotransmitters that help stabilize your mood. During an era when each day seems to bring new stress, it's no wonder that massage has become increasingly popular as a means of reducing anxiety. "Americans are looking to massage for much more than just relaxation," says Mary Beth Braun of the American Massage Therapy Association. The human body was designed to respond to danger, such as an attack by wild beasts, by either fleeing or fighting.

Both those actions require extra levels of cortisol, known as the "stress hormone," which suppresses the immune system and increases blood sugar levels to keep our muscles ready for fight or flight. But since most of today's problems don't involve wild beasts, sustaining higher cortisol levels can lead to digestive problems, headaches and insomnia.

If you carry anxiety symptoms in your shoulders, back and neck, a professional massage can specifically target those areas. Regardless of where you carry tension, studies have shown that massage increases your body's levels of oxytocin and serotonin, which results in lowered stress. The feeling of relaxation created by regular massage therapy also lowers your blood pressure and elevates your mood. When your body is relaxed, your nervous system responds with a lower heart rate and improved breathing. Deep sleep becomes easier to achieve, because your muscles remember the sensation vividly enough to recreate it at home, which enables you to enjoy a healthier life.

### **Massage Therapy and Stress**

Virtually every symptom listed by the American Psychological Association can benefit from massage. Research has shown that it can lower your heart rate and blood pressure, relax your muscles and increase the production of endorphins, your body's natural "feel good" chemical. Serotonin and dopamine are also released through massage, and the result is a feeling of calm relaxation that makes chronic or habitual as well as acute or short-term stress much easier to overcome. In fact, stress relief is one of the first benefits that come to mind when thinking of massage therapy. It's also a key component for anyone trying to achieve a healthier lifestyle. Clinical studies show that even a single 1 ½-hour session can significantly lower your heart rate, cortisol levels and insulin levels -- all of which explain why massage therapy and stress relief go hand-in-hand. Taking care of your body should be at the top of your priorities. By adding therapeutic massage to your routine now, you'll feel, look and simply be healthier far into the future. In fact, stress relief alone can improve your vitality and state of mind. So what better way to prep for a long, happy life than a relaxing, therapeutic massage?

- **Reduce stress levels**

We encounter stress everywhere, from noise and pollution on the street to the trials of everyday life. It is now known that a build-up of stress can lead to illness and disease. One of the easiest and most effective ways of letting go of built-up stress is to let someone literally massage the stress away.

- **Relieves muscular aches & tension**

Overused, underused or stressed muscles can become tight, sore and prone to injury. When the muscles are tense or in spasm the tissues are in a heightened state of aggravation, this can manifest as pain or discomfort. Massage soothes this nervous irritation, sending positive messages to the Central Nervous System, a massage treatment will release tension, leaving muscles feeling better and working more efficiently.

- **Aids the elimination of toxins**

Stress, pollution, chemicals in food, etc., all leave a toxic residue in the body. Massage stimulates the Lymphatic System, the body's 'waste disposal unit', to facilitate the removal of toxins and other metabolic by-products, including lactic acid which causes the 'burn' or ache experienced after strenuous work-out. In this way massage can also improve recovery from training.

- **Tones skin & muscles**

The mechanical stimulation that Remedial Massage provides increases circulation and helps to tone the outer layers of skin, muscle and adipose tissue (fat). The frictional aspect of the massage improves the skin's texture through increased oxygenation and removal of dead skin cells, the oils used in the treatment are also nourishing and moisturizing.

- **Improves Flexibility**

On our own we are only able to stretch our muscles length-wise. The transverse movements used in Remedial Massage stretch the muscle in other directions to untangle fibers that have become knotted together, and break up contusions and scar tissues when muscles get very tense circulation is hindered, inhibiting oxygen and nutrient supply to cells. Tight muscles and tendons can also restrict movements and cause pain and discomfort in the joints. A thorough massage loosens you up, just like a big stretch, only better.

### **Back Massage Therapy**

Back pain happens to almost everyone at some point. In fact, when looking for information on massage, more people search for "back massage" than for shoulders, knees, hands, neck or any other part of the body. Your back has so many hard-working muscles and ligaments that it's easy to experience strain and pain in different areas throughout your life. According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, back pain is the second most common neurological ailment in the United States. And the American Chiropractic Association estimates that eight

of every ten people are troubled by back pain at some point. Massage can help alleviate the muscle spasms which occur when your rib or thoracic joints lose mobility, thereby helping those joints function better. It's even possible to increase the mobility of your sacroiliac joint or tailbone by massaging the gluteal muscles and releasing tension in the tissues. Along with enhancing other types of medical treatment, back massage therapy can provide significant relief of incidental or chronic pain. Whether chronic pain is due to limited mobility of the vertebral, pelvic and rib joints or to compression of nerves through muscle spasm, disease or structural dysfunction, it helps to find a professional therapist who's experienced in back massage.

### **Relaxation and Wellness**

In addition to pain relief, massage can provide other benefits because regular massage therapy helps your body maintain a higher level of relaxation. This helps reduce stress, improve sleep and increase the endorphins that act as natural mood boosters. Your body can function better after a massage because of increased circulation, which brings newly oxygenated blood to your muscles and transports metabolic waste away from your internal organs. Back massage therapy also provides greater flexibility, since relaxed muscles and limber joints allow for improved range of motion.

### **Massage Therapy for Neck Pain**

Describing any situation as "a pain in the neck" is a sure way of letting people know how bad things are. For many people, that phrase can be taken literally. In fact, the U.S. National Institute of Health Statistics reports that 15% of Americans are troubled by neck pain. Usually the pain is caused by something simple, like hunching your shoulders over a keyboard or work surface. Posture can be another factor. Other causes include arthritis, whiplash, a pinched nerve, muscle strain or degenerative disease. Whether it's chronic or lasts only a short time, neck pain can be relieved by massage. Regular massage therapy helps keep your entire body free of pain. When you're suffering from neck pain in particular, the massage will focus first on your shoulders and upper back. "Massage of the neck itself may exacerbate symptoms at first, but gentle massage of the arms, chest, legs and back proves to reduce pain in the neck," says Elaine Calenda of the Boulder College of Massage Therapy. "Myofascial release and thorough massage of all the neck, face, jaw, head and throat muscles, promote full healing and restoration of function." Along with relieving neck pain, receiving massage on a regular basis helps keep all your joints limber, which reduces your chances of pulling a muscle. It also improves your posture and flexibility, increases range of motion, lowers blood pressure and heart rate, encourages relaxation and relieves stress.

### **Massage Therapy Improves Posture**

From board meetings to bunko groups, there's a lot of tension these days-as in neck and back tension. "Our necks and backs hurt, and poor posture is the No. 1 culprit," says Janice Novak, M.S., author of the book, *Posture, Get it Straight!* (Perigee Trade, 1999). When you hunch forward, your body isn't properly aligned. "Not only does poor posture look bad, but it forces some muscles to work incredibly hard all day long while others get weaker," Novak says. Poor posture can put you in other slumps, too. "When you slouch, you're pressing down on your internal organs, which affects digestion," Novak says, adding that circulation and breathing capacity can take a hit too. Unlike other bad habits, poor posture can be relaxing to correct. Why? Because massage can help get your body back on track. Allowing the body to reinforce healthy and natural movements can be one of the most beneficial aspects of massage therapy. Massage can relax and loosen the muscles made sore by bad posture, allowing your body to position itself in its natural-and pain-free-posture. With ongoing massage the muscles are loosened and relaxed-joints have greater freedom and pressure points are relieved. This allows the body to position itself in a healthy and natural posture, therefore avoiding the movements and positions developed over time as a reaction to the pain. If ongoing massage is of interest to you, please visit our [Massage Envy Spa membership page](#).

- Muscles are loosened and relaxed
- Joints enjoy greater freedom
- Pressure points are relieved

### **Massage Therapy Improves Blood Circulation**

The long-term effects of massage therapy are more than skin deep. Better blood circulation is part of the chain reaction that occurs in the body as a result of receiving massage therapy on a regular basis. According to Eileen Cahalane of *Alive Magazine*: A person with poor circulation can suffer from a variety of discomforts including pooling of the fluid in the extremities (like the toes), cold hands and feet, fatigue and achiness created by an accumulation of lactic acid in the muscles. Good circulation brings damaged, tense muscles the oxygen rich blood they need to heal. Massage facilitates circulation because the pressure created by the massage technique actually moves blood through the congested areas. The release of this same pressure causes new blood to flow in. The squeezing and pulling also flushes lactic acid from the muscles and improves the circulation of the lymph fluid which carries metabolic waste away from muscles and internal organs, resulting in lower blood pressure and improved body function. Improved blood circulation is just one more benefit of massage therapy. Combined with a balanced

diet and regular exercise, massage can be a powerful, natural ally for a healthier lifestyle.

- Enhances blood flow
- Naturally lowers blood pressure
- Improves body function

### **Massage Therapy Lowers Blood Pressure**

High blood pressure has more misconceptions than nearly any other medical condition. Here are some common misconceptions according to the American Heart Association:

**Myth:** High blood pressure has many symptoms

**Fact:** High blood pressure has NO symptoms. That's why it's often called the silent killer.

**Myth:** High blood pressure is a man's problem

**Fact:** High blood pressure can be anyone's problem. In fact, women need to be aware of certain things that may put them at greater risk than men.

**Myth:** You don't need to have your high blood pressure checked until you reach middle age.

**Fact:** Children as young as six can have high blood pressure. It's a good idea to start having your blood pressure checked at an early age. One effective way to stave off high blood pressure naturally is massage therapy. Long-term studies have shown that a consistent massage program can decrease diastolic and systolic blood pressure; decrease salivary and urinary cortisol stress-hormone levels; and lower sources for depression, anxiety and hostility. If you or someone you know is looking for natural ways to help lower blood pressure.

- Lower depression, anxiety, and hostility
- Keeps stress hormone levels under control
- Low blood pressure can contribute to lowering the odds of having a heart attack, kidney failure, or a stroke

### **Massage Therapy Improves Flexibility**

Muscle injuries are more common now than they were 50 years ago. That's not because we're exercising harder. It's because we're more sedentary. What's worse, as we age our joints tend to tighten, making range of motion and flexibility even more restricted. Massage therapy is a beneficial treatment for maintaining and improving flexibility and motion. By working on muscles, connective tissues, tendons, ligaments, and joints, regular massage can improve your flexibility and range of motion, keeping your joints more fluid and making them less injury prone. As you can see, massage is a great way to relax stressed muscles, stimulate blood flow and improve flexibility. So is daily stretching. One benefit of stretching is an improvement of blood circulation, which aids in illness recovery and disease prevention. Elongating muscles will also improve posture and your joints' range of motion. Stretching and massage are even more important for someone who is physically active. Loose muscles are less prone to strains and sprains during a workout, according to ACE. Incorporating massage and stretching into a fitness routine also will help reduce soreness after a workout. Stretching beforehand will allow greater freedom of movement when exercising and longer workout periods because it helps prevent a buildup of lactic acid in your blood. Regular post-workout massages can then aid in the recovery and relaxation process.

- Stimulates the production of the body's natural lubricants to keep flexibility at a maximum
- Can enhance athletic performance
- Helps prevent active lifestyle injuries by staying flexible

### **Massage Therapy Strengthens the Immune System**

Regular therapeutic massage sessions provide significant benefits beyond the immediate relaxation we enjoy. People who experience high levels of stress tend to get sick more than others. Combine stress with lack of sleep and poor nutrition, and our immune system's ability to naturally protect itself against bacteria and infection is greatly reduced. So the question is: What are the benefits of massage on immune system? Clinical studies have indicated that regular massage not only helps alleviate stress, but can naturally increase the immune system's cytotoxic capacity (the activity level of the body's natural "killer cells") and decrease the number of T-cells, which improves the body's immune functioning overall. In one study by Gail Ironson, M.D., HIV positive men were given 45 minute massages five days a week, for a month. They showed an increase in serotonin and an increase in cells that are viewed as the first line of defense in the immune system.

- Increases the body's natural killer cells
- Aids in the fight against bacteria and infection
- Naturally enhances the body's ability to get nourishment to important areas

Helpful Wellness Tip: Massage therapy may be a great addition to your exercise program. Just like regular exercise can keep your muscles strong, regular massage can help keep your immune system performing at its peak.