

# Touching Connection

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## The Benefits of Massage

### Bodywork Goes Beyond Relaxation

As you lie on the table under crisp, fresh sheets, hushed music draws you into the moment. The smell of sage fills the air and you hear the gentle sound of massage oil being warmed in your therapist's hands. Once the session gets underway, the daily stressors and aching muscles fade into an oblivious 60 minutes of relief, and all you can comprehend right now is not wanting it to end.

But what if that hour of massage did more for you than just take the pressures of the day away? What if that gentle, Swedish massage helped you combat cancer? What if bodywork helped you recover from a strained hamstring in half the time? What if your sleep,

cultures. Touching is a natural human reaction to pain and stress, and for conveying compassion and support. When you bump your head or have a sore calf, the natural response is to rub it to feel better. The same was true of our earliest ancestors.

Healers throughout time and throughout the world have instinctually and independently developed a wide range of therapeutic techniques using touch. Many are still in use today, and with good reason. We now have scientific proof of the benefits of massage -- benefits ranging from treating chronic diseases and injuries to alleviating the growing tensions of our modern lifestyles. Having a massage does more



Along with easing stress -- the No. 1 cause of disease -- massage has a long list of benefits.

digestion, and mood all improved with massage and bodywork? What if these weren't just "what if's"?

Evidence is showing that the more massage you can allow yourself, the better you'll feel. Here's why:

Massage as a healing tool has been around for thousands of years in many

than just relax your body and mind -- there are specific physiological and psychological changes that occur, and even more so when massage is utilized as a preventative, frequent therapy and not simply mere luxury. Massage not only feels good, but it can cure what ails you.

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*Nothing is so strong as gentleness. Nothing is so gentle as real strength.*

-Frances de Sales

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## The Fallout of Stress

Experts estimate that 80 percent to 90 percent of disease is stress-related. Massage and bodywork is there to combat that frightening number by helping us remember what it means to relax. The physical changes massage brings to your body can have a positive effect in many areas of your life. Besides increasing relaxation and decreasing anxiety, massage lowers blood pressure, increases circulation, improves injury recovery, encourages deep sleep, and increases concentration. It reduces fatigue and gives you more energy to handle stressful situations.

Massage is a perfect elixir for good health, but it can also provide an integration of body and mind. By producing a meditative state or heightened awareness of the present moment, massage can provide emotional and spiritual balance, bringing with it true relaxation and peace.

The incredible benefits of massage are doubly powerful if taken in regular "doses." Researchers from the Touch Research Institute (TRI) at the University of Miami, found that recipients of massage can benefit even in small doses (15 minutes of chair massage or a half-hour table session). They also note that receiving bodywork two to three times a week is even more beneficial. While this may not be feasible, it's nice to know that this "medicine" only gets better with frequency.

## What It Does

In an age of technical and, at times, impersonal medicine, massage offers a drug-free, non-invasive, and humanistic approach based on the body's natural ability to heal itself. Following is a brief list of the many known, research-based benefits of massage and bodywork:

- Increases circulation, allowing the body to pump more oxygen and nutrients into tissues and vital organs;
- Stimulates the flow of lymph, the body's natural defense system, against

toxic invaders. For example, in breast cancer patients, massage has been shown to increase the cells that fight cancer. Furthermore, increased circulation of blood and lymph systems improves the condition of the body's largest organ -- the skin;

- Relaxes and softens injured and overused muscles;
- Reduces spasms and cramping;
- Increases joint flexibility;
- Reduces recovery time and helps prepare the body for strenuous workouts, reducing subsequent muscle pain of athletes at any level;
- Releases endorphins -- the body's natural painkiller -- and is proving very beneficial in patients with chronic illness, injury, and post-op pain;

- Reduces post-surgery adhesions and edema and can be used to reduce and realign scar tissue after healing has occurred;

- Improves range-of-motion and decreases discomfort for patients with low back pain;

- Relieves pain for migraine sufferers and decreases the need for medication;

- Provides exercise and stretching for atrophied muscles and reduces shortening of the muscles for those with restricted range of motion;

- Assists with shorter labor for expectant mothers, as well as reduces the need for medication, eases postpartum depression and anxiety, and contributes to a shorter hospital stay.



Drinking plenty of water after a massage is important for helping wash toxins from the body.

# De-stressing the Commute

## Turning Road Rage into Road Sage

The average American commuter spends an hour a day driving to and from work. During this stressful, stop-and-go time, it's likely that blood pressure increases, adrenaline begins pumping, and muscles constrict and tighten. By the time you get home, you're wiped out and grumpy, and you have less to offer to those you come home to. If this sounds familiar, recognize that you have the power to reduce commuter stress. Here are a few tips to make your commuter time contribute to -- rather than detract from -- your life.

- Employ adjustable back cushions, pillows, wedges, and lumbar supports for a more comfortable commute. For more information, check out [www.relaxtheback.com](http://www.relaxtheback.com).

- To successfully sidestep the late-afternoon slump often caused by the stress hormone cortisol, keep some healthy snacks within arms reach. Celery, string cheese, water, and nuts -- especially almonds -- are good options for the drive home.

- Borrow books-on-tape/CD from the library. Consider purely entertaining novels to ease the intensity of your drive.

- Learn a foreign language. Libraries also loan out these types of tapes and CD, too.

- Use your commute as an opportunity for spiritual or emotional growth. When stressing about a traffic jam, remind yourself that it's completely out of your control. Remember, attitude is everything.

- Practice breathing. When stress occurs, breathing becomes shallow and constricted. Taking full, deep breaths gives the body more oxygen, helping to regulate physical and mental function. Exhaling fully releases tension and built up toxins.

For more ideas on achieving calm in a busy world, consider reading *Serenity to Go: Calming Techniques for Your Hectic Life* (New Harbinger Publications, 2001) by Mina Hamilton.



**Creativity goes a long way on your commute.**

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# The Scoop on Meditation

## A Simple Practice with Profound Benefits

People who meditate regularly appear internally and externally five to 10 years younger than their non-meditating peers, according to author Deepak Chopra. That's good news for the estimated 10 million people who practice meditation on an ongoing basis and experience the resulting calm it cultivates.

The rich benefits come from doing something that looks like nothing: Sitting still, being quiet, and breathing deeply. Meditation works simply but profoundly by defusing the onslaughts of life -- a racing mind, busyness, deadlines, commutes, all of which have physiological effects on well-being. Meditation calms the nervous system, decreases metabolic rate, heart rate, and

blood pressure, and lowers levels of cholesterol, stress hormones, and free radicals. It also has a direct effect on breathing, slowing and deepening respiration so more oxygen circulates throughout the body. Not only that, meditation is said to lessen feelings of anxiety and depression and improve memory and concentration. And all of this culminates in slowing the aging process, as Chopra notes.

There are many meditation techniques, including focusing on a mantra, a sacred word or phrase, or your breath. But the basic intent of all meditation is focus and attention. And it doesn't take hours a day in an ashram to meditate effectively. Benefits kick in with even a short period of devoted time.

How to begin? Wear comfortable, unrestrictive clothes, sit on a cushion or chair with your back straight (think once again, comfort), rest your hands on your legs, let your eyes go soft and out of focus or close them, breathe slowly and deeply, and -- the hardest part -- attempt to empty your mind of thoughts and quiet the internal dialogue. When thoughts flit through your mind, let them pass without judging them and come back to your focus (your mantra, counting, etc.) and breathing.

Start with this sitting meditation technique for five minutes a day, and add on time as you get more at ease with the process. For more information on techniques and benefits, check out [www.abc-of-meditation.com](http://www.abc-of-meditation.com).

*There came a  
time when the  
risk to remain  
tight in the bud  
was more  
painful than the  
risk it took to  
blossom.*

-Anais Nin

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after your massage. If for any reason you are not completely  
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with you.

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