

Do I deserve a good massage?

During our ergonomic training sessions, many of you asked if massage was beneficial to the body. Massage affects the body as a whole. The past ten years or so have seen a proliferation of different terms, titles, and systems of massage such as: Therapeutic, Holistic, Swedish, Sports, Neuromuscular, Bodywork, Oriental, Shiatsu, Acupressure, Esalen, Reichian, Polarity, Reflexology, etc. For the sake of clarity, the term massage or massage therapy, as used in this text, refers to the scientific manipulation of soft tissues.

To understand how massage therapy works, let's briefly discuss the physiological effects of massage. Massage increases blood circulation and lymph flow. The direct mechanical effect of rhythmically applied manual pressure and movement used in massage can dramatically increase the rate of blood flow. Also, the stimulation of nerve receptors causes the blood vessels (by reflex action) to dilate, which also facilitates blood flow.

A milky white fluid called lymph carries impurities and waste away from the tissues and passes through gland-like structures spaced throughout the lymphatic system that act as filtering valves. The lymphatic system nourishes the body by carrying nutrients to the cells. It is also the system that cleanses and rejuvenates. Lymph travels through the channels of the body that the circulatory system cannot reach. The lymphatic system is our immune system.

The lymph does not circulate as the blood does, therefore, its movement depends largely on the squeezing effect of muscle contractions. Consequently, inactive people fail to stimulate lymph flow. On the other hand, the increased waste produced by that activity could outstrip the stimulation caused by vigorous activity. Massage can dramatically aid the movement of lymph in either case.

For the whole body to be healthy, the sum of its parts (the cells) must be healthy. The individual cells of the body are dependent on an abundant supply of blood and lymph because these fluids supply nutrients and oxygen and carry away wastes and toxins. Therefore, it is important to understand why good circulation is vital to our health and why massage is beneficial for the entire body.

Massage is also known to increase oxygen capacity of the blood by 10-15% after massage - Loosen contracted, shortened muscles and stimulate weak, flaccid muscles, help posture and promote more efficient movement - Speed recovery from fatigue that occurs after exercise - A massage will increase excretion of nitrogen, inorganic phosphorus, and sodium chloride (salt). The Massage balances the nervous system by soothing or stimulating it, depending on which effect is needed by the individual at the time of the massage - Enhance your skin condition by directly improving the function of the sebaceous (oil) and sweat glands which keep the skin lubricated, clean, and cooled.



When exercising, while the muscles are getting into shape, they have trouble getting enough oxygen and nutrients, and wastes backup and stagnate. Unfortunately, many exercise programs regard aches and pains as the inevitable price to pay. This is simply not true because massage can be used as the Greeks and Romans used it--to increase endurance and control fatigue as part of a regular health program. Massage disperses the accumulated by-products of muscle action that irritate muscles and nerve endings. Lactic and carbonic acids build-up in muscle tissue shortly after exercise begins. These acids are waste products that contribute to causation of the pain and occasional cramping that exercisers, athletes, dancers, etc. suffer during and/or after workouts or performing. These acids are formed when the glycogen stored in the liver and muscles is burned to produce the energy expended during exercise. The acids must eventually be reconverted to glycogen and stored again, or drained out via the lymph and circulatory systems. Pain and fatigue persists until this process of reconvertng or excreting is completed. Massage can help eliminate the irritation caused by these wastes, thus increasing muscle recovery rates.

Having a massage can affect internal organs by directly or indirectly stimulating nerves that supply internal organs. When massage has been substituted for rest, an increase from 20-75%, even 100% muscle recovery has been recorded. For example, this is why boxers are massaged rather than rested between rounds.

Furthermore, a massage also aids recovery from soft tissue injuries such as sprains and strains by accelerating the growth and repair of tissue with efficient circulation in the injured areas. A massage can aid internal nutrition rates by improving circulation. The relationship of stress and illness is of interest to anyone maintaining their health.

A massage has a definite psychological effect. Since massage animates the tactile sense, the body's primary sense, it brings people into the here and now and away from tension generated by constant preoccupation with problems. Also, loosening of muscle tension or armoring--the physical counterpart to how we defend and protect ourselves from psychological pain--can lead to freeing of repressed emotions.

Finally, massage is what Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine and an advocate of massage, defined as "vis medicatrix naturae," or the body's natural recuperative powers, the life force. Headaches, insomnia, constipation, spastic colon, arthritis, asthma, carpal tunnel syndrome, sinusitis, and minor aches and pains are some of the problems that can respond to massage therapy. Massage can have an excellent effect on nervous people who have been dependent on their pharmacy for rest and relaxation.

A massage is a unique way of communicating without words, sharing energy, enjoying pleasurable relaxation, and experiencing peace of mind. So, should you treat yourself to a massage? It might not be healthy not to.

Stéphane Trottier

Any comments or request can be made to info@IHFCErgo.com

