

## Massage as the Body's Workout

### Can Bodywork Sometimes Make You Sore?

Shirley Vanderbilt

You've just had a wonderful massage, and you go home feeling both relaxed and rejuvenated. But later that night you feel like you're coming down with something. Or perhaps the next morning, you wake up with twinges of muscle soreness, maybe some fatigue, and you just don't feel yourself. What happened? Chances are it's the massage, and it's perfectly OK.

Keith Grant, head of the Sports and Deep Tissue Massage Department at McKinnon Institute in Oakland, Calif., says, "It's very much like doing a workout. If the muscles aren't used to it, they often respond with some soreness." Grant notes this should last for no more than a day or two. If it lasts longer, the

therapist can find all the kinks that have built up from daily stress and too little or too much exercise. The whole point of a therapeutic massage is to release that tension, work out the kinks, and help your body relax so it can function at an optimal level. All of this work stretches muscles, pushes blood into them, and gets things working again.

#### A Closer Look

There are several theories, in addition to muscle function, as to why people sometimes experience after-effects from massage.

Massage can stimulate the lymph system, which is comprised of several organs

*Everything you do can be done better from a place of relaxation.*

-Stephen C. Paul



A good massage can sometimes leave you feeling like you had a good workout.

massage may have been too intense, and the therapist should adjust for this in the next session. However, just as with exercise, when your body adjusts to having this type of workout, your physical response will also be less intense.

A professional massage is more than an ordinary backrub. Your massage

(thymus, tonsils, spleen, adenoids), hundreds of lymph nodes, and a multitude of vessels that run throughout the body. These lymphatic vessels carry a clear fluid, known as lymph, that circulates around the body's tissues, absorbing fluid, waste products, dead cells, bacteria, viruses, fats, and proteins

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from the tissue as it goes, while also giving passage to immune cells as they're needed. Massage can sometimes stimulate the lymph system, helping to eliminate toxins from the body. And if the body contains a high level of environmental or dietary toxins, you could feel some mild, flu-like symptoms. While most people come out of a typical massage feeling nothing but relaxed, some people do report feeling a bit nauseous. If this is the case, make sure to drink plenty of water and perhaps take a slow walk. Movement creates a greater lymphatic response and will hurry the process along.

Grant points to another theory being closely examined by experts. Neurological sensitivity, or "sensitization," looks at the "whole response of what's going on in a person." As Grant explains, massage provides a significant amount of input to the central nervous system and the body responds to that increased information. Pain and other occasional after-effects may be the result of a system that has received more information than it can handle at that particular time. And because the amount of sensory input we receive during any day or week is always fluctuating, sometimes we may be overloaded and other times not. It depends on the total stress (emotional, spiritual and physical) being experienced by the body at that moment.

## Minimizing Overload

So what can you do to minimize the sometimes uncomfortable side effects? It's important to communicate with your massage therapist regarding your expectations, as well as your current state of health. Your therapist can then tailor the massage to your personal needs and desires, and make adjustments in intensity or technique as the session proceeds. "I'd look at what's being done," says Grant. In some cases, a shorter or more soothing session may be more appropriate. In others, the therapist may need to change the kind of technique used. Much of this can be judged by how the person is feeling and responding during the massage.

In addition to communicating clearly with your practitioner throughout the session, following a few simple steps will help ease tenderness and maximize

benefits:

- UNDERSTAND THAT EVERY BODY REACTS DIFFERENTLY.

Your body is an organism made up of complex systems that react to a constantly changing influx of external factors.

- MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH PRACTICES.

This means keeping your mind free of negative clutter.

- DRINK PLENTY OF WATER IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING YOUR TREATMENT.

Continue to do so for the next day or two. This will rehydrate your tissues and ease the effects.

- TAKE IT EASY AFTER YOUR MASSAGE.

Go home, relax and just allow your body to find its balance naturally.

Getting a massage can do you a world of good. And getting massage frequently can do even more. This is the beauty of bodywork. Taking part in this form of regularly scheduled self-care can play a

huge part in how healthy you'll be and how youthful you'll remain. Budgeting time and money for bodywork at consistent intervals is an investment in your health. And remember: just because massage feels like a pampering treat doesn't mean it is any less therapeutic. Consider massage appointments a necessary piece of your health plan, and work with your practitioner to establish a treatment schedule that best meets your needs.

Like exercise, making bodywork a habitual practice is good for your health. And if you wake up the next morning a little sore, it's probably because you had a really good massage.



Bodywork can stimulate the lymph system, which can help detox the body.

# Keeping Your Back Healthy

## Tips to Avoid Lasting Pain

Chances are good that, at some point in your life, you will have back pain. In fact, 70-85 percent of Americans will experience back pain at some point in their lives. But even with those odds, there are still several ways to minimize your risk and give yourself the best chance to live pain-free.

Several factors can cause back pain, including stress, poor posture, bad ergonomics, lack of exercise, arthritis, osteoporosis, a sedentary lifestyle, overexertion, pregnancy, kidney stones, fibromyalgia, excess weight, and more.

With all of these potential causes lurking, it's important to look at behaviors that can help you prevent and avoid back pain before it starts. Here are a few simple healthy back tips from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke:

- Stretch and warm tissues before exercise or other strenuous activities.
- Practice good posture. Avoid

slouching when sitting or standing.

--When standing, keep your weight balanced on both feet.

--Follow good ergonomics in the workplace. When sitting for long periods of time, rest your feet on a foot support. Make sure your chair and work surfaces are at the proper height. Get up and move around in between long sitting stints.

--Avoid high-heeled shoes.

--Watch your weight. Excess weight, especially around the waist, can put undue stress on lower back muscles.

--Exercise. Core strengthening moves, especially, will also benefit your back.

--Don't lift items that are heavier than you can handle. Remember to lift with your knees, not your back. Pull in your stomach muscles, keep your head down and in line with your straight back, and do not twist when lifting.

--Get a massage. Using therapeutic bodywork can melt pain-inducing stress away from your back and the rest of your body.



Massage is a great way to beat back pain.

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# Massage for Old Injuries

## Ancient Injuries Don't Have to Make You Feel Old

*Art Riggs*

Injuries such as chronic back pain, trick knees, and sticky shoulders are not necessarily something you just have to live with. Massage techniques might hold the key to unlocking this old pain.

### Will Massage Help?

The benefits of massage will depend on the extent of the injury, how long ago it occurred, and on the skill of the therapist. Chronic and old injuries often require deeper and more precise treatments with less emphasis on general relaxation and working on the whole body. Massage works best for soft tissue injuries to muscles and tendons and is most effective in releasing adhesions and lengthening muscles that have shortened due to compensatory reactions to the injury. Tight and fibrous muscles not only hurt at the muscle or its tendon, but can also interfere with proper joint

movement and cause pain far away from the original injury.

Therapists who perform such work often have specialized names for their work--such as orthopedic massage, neuromuscular therapy, myofascial release, medical massage, etc.,--but many massage therapists utilize an eclectic approach combining the best of the specialties.

### It Works!

A recent Consumer Reports article ran the results of a survey of thousands of its readers and reported that massage was equal to chiropractic care in many areas, including back and neck pain. Massage also ranked significantly higher than some other forms of treatment, such as physical therapy or drugs.

If that nagging injury persists, consider booking a massage. Be sure to discuss the injury with your practitioner: How did you receive the injury? Have you reinjured it? And what exactly are your symptoms? Often, the body compensates in one area to protect another that has been traumatized, and this can create new problems.

Discuss the issues with your massage therapist. (Sometimes just talking about old injuries can play a significant role in the healing process.) Together, the two of you can work to determine a treatment plan.

*Those who bring  
sunshine into the  
lives of others,  
cannot keep it  
from themselves.*

-James M. Barrie

Whether you're a weekend warrior or a year-round gardener/ home improver/ outdoor enthusiast, your activity level is likely to increase this time of year. Don't let aches and pains prevent you from enjoying the season. Get a massage, then go and 'get er done!'

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