

Treat Yourself Right – Articles for Wellness

July-August 2011 Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

The Power of Touch

In a High-tech World, It Pays to Reach Out

Nora Brunner

Physician and holistic health pioneer Rachel Naomi Remen once confessed that as a pediatric intern she was an unrepentant baby kisser, often smooching her little patients as she made her rounds at the hospital. She did this when no one was looking because she sensed her colleagues would frown on her behavior, even though she couldn't think of a single reason not to do it.

The lack of basic human contact in our high-tech medical system reflects a larger social ill that has only recently started to get some attention--touch deprivation. The cultural landscape is puzzling. On the one hand, we are saturated in suggestive messages by the

skin-to-skin contact is beneficial to human health, American social norms inhibit this most basic form of human interaction and communication. Despite our supposedly enlightened attitudes, we Americans are among the most touch-deprived people in the world.

"Touch deprivation is a reality in American culture as a whole," writes Reverend Anthony David of Atlanta. "It's not just babies needing to be touched in caring ways, or the sick. It's not just doctors and nurses needing to extend it. It's all of us, needing connection, needing to receive it, needing to give it, with genuine happiness at stake."



High-tech can mean low-touch. Ensure you're getting the tactile connection humans require.

mass media; on the other hand, the caring pediatrician is afraid someone might look askance at her planting a kiss on a baby's forehead. What's wrong with this picture?

Social Norms

Unfortunately, touch has become, well, a touchy subject. Though there's growing scientific evidence that

Distant, Disconnected

How did we come to deprive ourselves so tragically? According to Texas psychology professor David R. Cross, PhD, there are three reasons Americans don't touch each other more: fear of sexual innuendo, societal and personal

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Nothing is permanent in this wicked world – not even our troubles.

-Charlie Chaplin

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disconnection aided by technology, and the fact that the ill effects of non-touching are simply not that obvious and don't receive much attention.

It's no surprise Americans are often afraid physical touching signals romantic interest, which leads to the twin perils of either having our intentions misunderstood or wondering if someone's gesture is an uninvited advance. This ambiguity is more than enough to scare most people from taking someone's arm or patting them on the back.

The potential for the loaded gesture is further complicated by our litigious society in which unwelcome touch can mean, or be interpreted as, dominance, sexual harassment, or exploitation. People in the helping professions are regularly counseled on how to do their jobs without creating even a hint of ambiguity. In one extreme example, counselors at a children's summer camp were given the advice that when kids proactively hugged them, the counselors were to raise both arms over their heads to show they hadn't invited the contact and weren't participating in it. One wonders how the innocent minds of children will interpret this bizarre response to their spontaneous affection.

Another reason for touch phobia, according to Cross, is that we live in a society with far-flung families and declining community connections. Technology plays a significant role in the way we communicate, and it seems we move farther away from face-to-face communication with every new invention. How ironic that the old telephone company jingle that encouraged us to "Reach Out and Touch Someone" gave way to the slew of electronic devices we have today, all ringing and beeping for our attention. While these devices were invented to improve communication, some people wonder if the net effect is lower quality in our exchanges of information.

While there is scientific research showing non-touch is detrimental to health, Cross says those negative effects aren't obvious. The effects of a lack of touch are insidious and long-term and don't amount to a dramatic story for prime time.

"Humans deprived of touch are prone to mental illness, violence, compromised immune systems, and poor self-regulation," Cross says. So serious are the effects of touch deprivation, it's considered by researchers to be worse than physical abuse.

Benefits of Touch

Stated more positively, science does support the preventive health benefits of touch. For example, Tiffany Field, PhD, founder of the Touch Research Institute, notes that in a study on preterm infants, massaging the babies increased their weight and allowed them to be discharged earlier. Discharging babies earlier from expensive neonatal intensive care units could save the healthcare system \$4.7 billion annually.

In other research, scientists at the University of North Carolina found the

stress hormone cortisol was reduced with hugging. Cortisol is associated with anger, anxiety, physical tension, and weakened immunity.

Massage therapy has been found useful in reducing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, pain, and stress, and is helpful for those suffering with a variety of illnesses, including anorexia nervosa, arthritis, cancer, fibromyalgia, and stroke. While more research is needed, massage therapy has also been shown to reduce symptoms associated with alcohol withdrawal and smoking cessation, and can strengthen self-esteem, boost the immune system, increase flexibility, and improve sleep.

As a nation, we are still finding our way in terms of increasing our touch quotient; but those who make their way into a massage therapy room are farther along than most.



Massage helps boost self-worth and contribute to emotional well-being and connection.

The Wonders of Water

For Skin Health and More

Shelley Burns, N.D.

Creams, nutritional supplements, treatments, lotions, and potions. We are always looking for the next miracle product to keep skin looking healthy and young. However, there is one essential, inexpensive, and often overlooked nutrient right at your fingertips: water.

Just as a car cannot function without oil, our bodies cannot function without water. After oxygen, H₂O is the most important component of the body, responsible for 65-70 percent of its composition. And of this, 80 percent is dedicated to the skin.

Water is the medium for various enzymatic and chemical reactions in the body. It moves nutrients, hormones, antibodies, and oxygen through the blood and lymphatic systems, and it also helps form the matrix of the skin. Devoid of water, the skin becomes dehydrated, resulting in a dry, dull tone.

It's likely that the moment a person feels thirsty, mild dehydration has already set

in. To keep the complexion looking smooth and blemish-free, drink water upon waking and continue drinking it throughout the day at one- to two-hour intervals. At least six 8-oz. glasses of water should be consumed daily and more if you are exercising, perspiring, and/or in hot weather. Ideally, intake should be between ten and twelve 8-oz. glasses of water a day. One note: Don't increase water intake all at once, as the kidneys and digestive system need time to adjust. Add one 8-oz. glass every day or every second day.

What counts toward your daily water intake? Just the basics: water and herbal tea. Caffeinated beverages and alcoholic drinks are diuretics that can contribute to dehydration, requiring even more hydration after drinking.

Not only is water important for skin health, it can also play a key role in the prevention of disease. Drinking eight glasses of water a day can decrease the risk of colon cancer, bladder cancer, and potentially even breast cancer.



Water helps keep the body at optimum health.

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.

*Summer
afternoon – summer
afternoon;
to me those have
always been the
two most
beautiful words
in the English
language.*

-Henry James

Joseph will be offering chair massage at the Lansing Harbor Festival on August 13th from 10 am - 8 pm. Other Saturdays, Joseph will be at the Lansing Farmers' Market from 9am - 12:30pm at the Town Hall Parking Lot (29 Auburn Road). Come try a sample of Joseph's work! Or make an appointment to visit Joseph at his studio at 108 W. Buffalo Street, 2nd Floor, in Ithaca.

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