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HEALTH & FITNESS



EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF MASSAGE THERAPY

BY PATTIE CINELLI

Massage has been an important part of my health and fitness regimen over the past 20 years. I don't look at it as an indulgence or luxury reserved for those who have a disposable income and free time. Instead, I see massage as part of what keeps me drug, surgery and injury-free while being able to enjoy doing everything I want to do in fitness and leisure activities. Regular massages help keep me pain-free as well. They help keep my sinuses open, my muscles fluid and my stress-level low.

Other countries have recognized the value of massage in disease prevention. Even here some health care providers may reimburse for massage therapy to relieve stress and pain.

Massage may be the oldest and simplest form of medical care. According to www.holisticonline.com, Egyptian tomb paintings show people being massaged. In Eastern cultures, massage has been practiced continually since ancient times. A Chinese book from 2,700 B.C., It was one of the principal method of relieving pain for Greek and Roman physicians. Julius Caesar was said to have been given a daily massage to treat neuralgia. "The Physician Must Be Experi-

enced In Many Things," wrote Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, in the 5th century B. C., "but assuredly in rubbing... for rubbing can bind a joint that is too loose, and loosen a joint that is too rigid." In 1813 the Royal Central Institute was established in Stockholm Sweden where massage movements were scientifically studied. The most commonly known type of massage - Swedish - has become the basis of all Western forms of massage treatments.

Benefits and Contraindications of Massage

"Massage increases the blood, oxygen and nutrients flowing in the body," explained Jan Rovecamp, my massage therapist for many years. "Not only does massage relax you, but it has a chemical effect as well. When a muscle becomes warm from blood flow, the fascia (soft tissue) becomes more liquid and malleable." It improves circulation and can improve lymphatic drainage, she said.

Different kinds of massage can address different issues (see below); however, in general massage may help breathing, lower the heart and pulse rate, detoxify the body system, assist weight

loss, stimulate activity in skin and its glands, improve muscle tone, soothe and relax nerves, relieve stress and relieve emotional tension and pain. Conditions where massage may not be recommended include acute inflammation, redness, swelling, skin rash, difficulty breathing or varicose veins.

A massage should be a relaxing, pleasurable experience. The pain or pressure felt during some types of massage should always be temporary Finding the right therapist and the appropriate style can be daunting. The following are a brief description of some of the more popular massage techniques available.

Types of Massage

Swedish Massage is a general whole body massage using oils with gentle strokes on the skin. "You use superficial strokes with the palms or fingers--either long flowing strokes, percussive strokes or circular strokes," said Granetta Coleman, massage therapist at Healthy Motions Massage Therapy studio. "Therapists may blend Swedish with other techniques." Seated Massage is usually a half hour and focuses on the upper back and neck. A client is fully clothed. It is good for someone new to massage.

Deep Tissue Massage uses

increased pressure to reach deeper muscle tissue. Therapists often use other parts of their body such as fists, elbows and forearms to generate deeper pressure in an area where tension is felt, explained Granetta. HoThe Teal Center in Arlington specializes in Neuromuscular Massage for the treatment of chronic and acute muscular pain. It includes careful observation and evaluation of posture and movement patterns followed by specific and thorough manipulation of muscles, tendons, ligaments, and fascia to release contracted tissue, increase circulation, erase trigger points, reduce nerve entrapment, and correct postural distortion. These techniques are very effective in the treatment of pain due to injury, stress, repetitive strain, postural distortion, post surgical syndromes, and chronic neuromuscular conditions.

Sports Massage combines various massage techniques, such as deep tissue, pressure-point therapy, cross joint mobilization and compression to enhance athletic performance. It is also used to help athletes perform free of pain and injuries. It can accelerate a body's recovery processes should an injury occur.

Thai Massage is an ancient art practiced by Buddhist monks in temples. It loosens and stretches muscles, improves movement and releases pain. "My clients report a feeling of tallness, better sleep and migraine relief," explained Vanessa King, a massage therapist and yoga instructor who specializes in Thai massage. "The meditative rhythm of the massage quiets the mind and allows a client to let go."

She said she combines stretching, palming meridians and acupressure along the pressure points of the body in a meditative flow that is often compared to a gentle chiropractic treatment, yoga class or physical therapy. Its great for back pain, should/neck tightness and stress," she said. She also works with people who have active cancer and hepatitis among other serious conditions. The only contraindi-

At first the stones were very hot, but within a few minutes I could feel the heat being absorbed by my body. It was exquisite. I then turned around and Granetta placed stones on the table for me to lie on and reapplied hot stones to my feet and hands. She continued stroking with different shaped stones. When the hour was over I floated out of her studio and continued to float for the rest of the evening. I had a deep, restful night's sleep. Granetta recommends hot stone for a person with chronic tension, arthritis and for people with sinus problems. It is also good for a regular exerciser because the heat from the stones loosens muscles.

Like many therapists Jan Rovcamp uses several massage techniques when giving a massage. "Communication is vital between client and therapist," she said in deciding what techniques will work best. Jan might use a gentle technique - Craniosacral Massage - that deeply relaxes and balances the spine and the head. The cranium refers to the cranium which is the bony part of the head. Sacral refers to the bony bottom of the spine called the sacrum. Craniosacral therapy is a manipulation of the head and bottom of the spine to restore optimum fluid movement. It can be especially useful in treating headaches, jaw problems, whiplash and back pain.

Finding a Massage Therapist

Once you decide the kind of massage you need the next step is to seek a professional that can accommodate your needs. One way to find a therapist is through a word-of-mouth referral. Another is to receive a referral from the American Massage Therapy Association, www.amtamassage.org or The Potomac Massage Therapy Institute, www.pmti.org.

For a hot stone massage, contact health Motions Massage Therapy, www.HealthyMotions.com. For a Thai



cations may be severe osteoporosis.

Last month I received my first **Hot Stone Massage** (shown) from Granetta Coleman. I had heard about hot stone massages and I was curious. Lying face down on a massage table Granetta placed smooth, hot stones along my spine. She also placed stones in my hands and strapped stones to my feet. She then began to systematically stroke my body with stones.

massage contact Vanessa King, 202-375-3701. To contact Jan Rovcamp call, 202-543-1419. To contact the Teal Center for Therapeutic Bodywork, visit www.teal-center.com. ■

Pattie Cinelli is a health and fitness writer, personal fitness trainer and lecturer in the Washington metropolitan area. She can be reached at fitness@pattiecinnelli.com.

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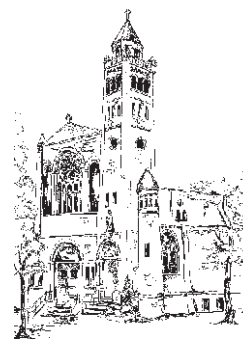
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HEALTH & FITNESS

HOW TO FIGHT FAIR

Communicating Effectively When You Disagree

BY RONDA BRESNICK HAUSS, LCSW

There are few things more frustrating than getting into an argument that leads to a total impasse. The frustration of not being able to settle your differences can lead to angry words and hurt feelings, straining and potentially damaging relationships. The key to resolving differences in a healthy way is in learning how to fight fair.

The first key is learning how to listen. People who communicate poorly rarely listen to what the other person is saying. They may hear the words and even be able to repeat them back, but they either misunderstand or fail to get the main point. Have you ever caught yourself thinking about what you want to say when another person is talking to you? Your silence does not mean you are actually listening. When you fight fairly, it means you let the other person know you are really listening to what they are saying and have understood their point.

Be respectful of the other person. Frustration and anger can cause people to engage in name calling, blaming and criticizing. This type of communication is both hurtful and counterproductive to resolving differences. For example, calling someone a "tightwad" or a "slob" turns the discussion into an attack on the other person's character and is unlikely to be productive. Fighting fairly means being respectful of the other person. It means censoring your own urge to engage in "character assassination."

Focus on the present and not the past. When working out a disagreement, try to avoid dredging up past conflicts that are unrelated. Instead, focus on the specific problem at hand and on one problem at a time. Try to define the problem in the present and in clear terms, such as, "We can't agree on who will do what around the house" as opposed to, "You never do anything around the house."

Be specific about what you want. Using such words as, "you always" or "you never" are generalizations that are unlikely to be accurate and are more likely to be another version of blaming. Such as, "You always leave your dirty socks on the floor." Fighting fairly means asking for what you want and being specific.

Deal with your anger appropriately. Stuffing your anger at the point you feel it, and letting it out as an overreaction to some later event, is not useful. Some people displace their anger onto others

rather than express it to the person they are angry with. Others deal with their anger passively, by "forgetting" to do what another person may have asked them to do. Still other people may criticize or blame to get their anger out. Fighting fairly means being direct - telling the other person that you are angry and explaining why. Sometimes it is appropriate to let your anger over

Don't try to talk the other person out of their feelings. Feelings arise in people without planning or decision. Yet, there are times when a person might try to suggest that another's feelings are not valid or should not be felt. Such as, "You shouldn't be upset about our finances." Fighting fairly means accepting the other person's feelings as valid and being willing to acknowledge them.

Don't assume you know what the other person is thinking. Sometimes people base their opinions on inaccurate assumptions about the other person. Mind reading is not a communication skill! Do not assume that you know what the other person is feeling or thinking. You can find out by asking them directly.

Work towards solutions. When there are major issues of disagreement, it is important not to rush to solve the issues quickly. Looking for solutions is often a matter of brainstorming. Try to generate a number of possible ideas. Look for solutions that will satisfy both people, which may involve making compromises. Recognize each other's constructive efforts. Talk about how various proposed solutions might or might not meet each of your needs.

Some problems do not have solutions that meet both people's needs. When there is no clear solution that will meet both peoples' needs, it is useful to assess how important each person's needs are. One helpful technique is for each person to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 how important his or her needs are in a particular situation. The person who feels less strongly might then choose to be generous and yield to the other person's needs.

Good communication is the foundation of all healthy relationships. Fighting fairly means developing the skills to resolve disagreements both equitably and with respect for the other. The reward for this is effort is greater intimacy in your relationships, a deeper understanding of another person and the satisfaction of being a better human being. ■

Ronda Bresnick Hauss is a licensed clinical social worker and the founder of the Quiet Waters Center for Trauma, Stress and Resilience, on Capitol Hill. She uses an integrative & holistic approach to psychotherapy - addressing the connection between the mind, body and spirit through the use of traditional talk therapy, meditation, visualization, and creative, non-verbal techniques. She can be reached at: 202.544.5050.

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