

Massage Therapy...Do you “knead” it?

If you study the history of medicine you certainly will be introduced to Hippocrates as he is known as the “father of medicine” and the oath most new medical doctors take is known as the Hippocratic Oath. Hippocrates in the 4th century B.C. referred to massage when he wrote “The physician must be acquainted with many things, and assuredly with rubbing”. Yes, massage is recognized by the medical profession as one of the oldest methods of treatment for several muscular and soft tissue medical problems, but yet a portion of our population has ambivalent or negative opinions about massage.

Most of the unfavorable expressions about massage that people of the generations above age 50 have can be attributed to media stereotypes, a lack of understanding, a personal bias, or body image issues. Some of us associate massage with prostitution or with sexual overtones so we do not make any effort to learn about its positive values. Many of us are self conscious about our bodies and think we may be embarrassed while others of us just have not linked massage to its health or therapeutic benefits.

The Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation organization defines massage as “the manipulation of superficial layers of muscle and connective tissue to enhance the function and promote relaxation and well-being”. Tissues may include muscles, tendons, ligaments, skin, joints, etc. Massage can be applied using full hands, fingers, elbows, knees, forearms and feet and there are over eighty different recognized massage techniques or modalities. You can find specific information about many of these treatments on the massagetoday.com website.

If you have some slight reservations, remember to concentrate on the health aspects as the correct terminology is *Massage Therapy*. It can be a natural alternative to medication taken for stress and its effects on one or more of our body systems. The benefits of massage therapy are numerous and varied. Stress relief is not the only reason you may want to consider this kind of treatment. A sampling of other physical and psychological issues that may be alleviated by a trained therapist include:

- Back, neck, and shoulder pain
- Inflammatory conditions such as arthritis and tendinitis
- Headaches and migraines
- Muscle spasms, strains, and sprains
- Repetitive strain injury such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Circulatory and respiratory problems
- Post-injury and post surgical rehabilitation
- Some sleep disorders
- Relief from chronic pain
- Recovery from strenuous workouts (frequently cited by both professional and amateur athletes)

Individuals who regularly receive massage therapy report many side benefits such as: lowering of blood pressure and heart rates; enhancing skin tone; improving concentration; increasing flexibility and range of motion; and aiding in mental relaxation.

When selecting a massage therapist choose a professional. In 2008 Michigan became the 39th state to require licensure for massage therapists. Now a person has to pass a licensure test and complete 500 hours of massage practice or clinical course work of no less than 500 hours to be able to identify themselves as massage therapists. Several Michigan county health departments also regulate this business. Once a massage therapist becomes state licensed, they are required to complete 18 hours of continuing education and renew their license every 3 years. When you make an appointment for a massage please ask if the therapist is licensed in Michigan. Currently there are over 100,000 massage therapists practicing in the United States but not everyone may be a professional so you are advised to ask about their credentials.

A review of recent literature indicates that there are very few risks to massage therapy if it is used appropriately and if provided by a trained, licensed massage professional. Of course it should not be done directly over bruises or unhealed wounds, abdominal hernias or any tumors, on skin which is burned or inflamed or infected, and in areas of recent bone fractures. Obviously it is best to check first with your physician as risks are more likely if you have heart disease, are prone to blood clots, or recently had surgery, radiation or chemotherapy.

Several research studies conducted about treating chronic diseases and patients with major injuries, neurological disorders, to alleviating the tensions of our lifestyles, show the many benefits of touch. Therefore many in the medical community are recommending massage therapy and it is becoming an integral part of hospice care also. Many medical experts estimate that 75-90% of diseases are stress related either in their origin or in their course of action. And, certainly the internal and external aging processes and effects of aging are negatively impacted by high stress. One way to mitigate stress can be through appropriate massage therapy.

You are invited to an interactive session to learn more about massage therapy. The Delta College *50+...Just Like Gold Program* offers monthly "Bits and Bites" sessions (the format is a bite of information along with a bite to eat) that introduce you to new topics, new options and new information. On Friday, November 19th the topic will be all about massage therapy. Immediately after lunch Susan Hunter Scott, Nationally Certified Massage Therapist and Healing Touch Practitioner will explain the variety of treatments, let you know what to expect at a session and demonstrate actual techniques that you can learn. Join us as we learn about the benefits of touch!

Sue Montesi
Dean of Learning Centers and Innovative Programs
Delta College