

Body Sense

spring 2012


massage, bodywork & healthy living

“I’m a Massage Convert”

From First-Timer
to Repeat Client

Unlock the Benefits of Bodywork
Try 3 Mini-Meditations

Sit Stronger to Control Back Pain

 Super Snacks

A public education
magazine brought to you by





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Setting the Stage

Have you ever tried to explain your massage experience to someone else? It's like trying to describe your favorite sorbet—impossible to accomplish, but fun to try.

In this Spring 2012 issue of *Body Sense*, a newcomer to massage therapy writes about his first session. His piece made me smile and I recalled my first massage. Years ago, working bizarre, stressful hours at a daily

newspaper, fate smiled and I was assigned to write about stone massage. Long story short: it was magical and I floated away.

After almost a decade as the editor of *Body Sense*, I now have a deeper understanding of what's necessary for a successful bodywork session. The ideal experience begins with our expectations and how our bodies feel at the time. Some days we may be ouchy and want something fixed; other days we may want to simply drift away.

The therapist meets those needs with a collection of amazing skills blended with a caring personality. Whether or not the practitioner is someone we know well, massage devotees understand that this person is answering a calling to nurture and serve us.

The rest of the client-therapist relationship is poetry: from the moment we nest ourselves on the table and exhale, the music stills our busy brains, and we begin to breathe away the knots and melt under knowing touch.

Before you float away, enjoy this issue, and the bodywork wisdom it holds for you.

—Leslie A. Young, Editor in Chief



Massage Soothes Sore Muscles

Exercise makes muscles sore, but research suggests that massage can help ease that pain, while also helping muscles heal faster. After research subjects performed a session of difficult exercise, they received Swedish massage on only one leg. Researchers biopsied muscles in each leg and found that massage activated genes that decrease inflammation and promote energy generation within cells, resulting in muscles that hurt less and grow quicker. The study was published in February in *Science Translational Medicine*. So, the next time you have a tough bout of exercise, conduct your own clinical trial and get a massage!



I'm a Massage Convert

From First-Timer to Repeat Client

By Sam Tudor

After I receive my paycheck for teaching in a rural community, I pay my rent, then spend the rest on extras, though sometimes even toilet paper can be considered an extra on my salary. Luxuries are often put off to the side by people like me, who live a hair above the poverty line.

The point is that taking care of myself can be a difficult thing to do; my membership at the gym is limited to free trials, my groceries are not organic, and the scratches on my prescription glasses I purchased four years ago have made me a little cross-eyed. I'm happy, though, mostly because of one extra I consistently turn to: massage therapy.

KARMA COMES AROUND

Chronic back problems have left me somewhat hobbled, but apparently all of the good deeds I've done in the classroom left karma with no choice but to give me a taste of the good life: you see, I have a friend, Kathleen, who is a massage therapist. She is an amazing individual who has introduced me to new worlds—one of those being the power of touch.

RURAL TEACHER GETS A MASSAGE

As a teacher of English, it is tough to offer up my services to people around me. Unless someone is editing a resume or needs a person to instruct an unruly group of teenagers, I am fairly useless. Kathleen has never had this problem. Everyone loves to get a massage. I have been able to give her a few laughs over the course of our friendship, but the first time she offered to give me a one-hour massage, I realized I was on the better half of this exchange.

It was a great situation for me. I had never been to her studio before, and, to be honest, I was a little embarrassed about the fact that I'd never actually had a massage. This plagued me at first, but as soon as she began the session intake, where she asked about my health history, I realized how professional the experience was going to be.

When she opened the entrance to her massage room, it felt like my blood pressure dropped 100 points. The room was perfectly lit and shared hints of sage and lavender incense; Tiki decorations silhouetted the

Massage therapy involves more than just rubbing down a body. Simply relaxing in this seclusion is as therapeutic as a day at the beach.

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Which word best describes how you feel after a massage?

Results taken from Massagetherapy.com poll

Relaxed
59%

Healthier
23%

Energized
13%

Emotional
3%



While there is a degree of physical pleasure with massage, the euphoria that follows for weeks makes a person more diligent and aware of his surroundings.

walls. The linens on the massage table were stretched tight, beckoning me to lie down. Faint music played. I had entered uncharted territory, and I liked it.

LETTING GO

Kathleen explained that when she left the room, I should undress, hang my clothes on a hook, and get under the covers on the massage table facedown. She left and closed the door behind her, leaving me in privacy. I placed my shoes side by side on a small rack, then my socks, shirt, and pants. It was then, as I stood in solitude wearing only my underwear, a plethora of thoughts entered my mind. I had no idea how to receive a massage. I know she wanted me to take off my clothes, but did she mean all of my clothes?

There is just something frightening about the idea of lying naked, facedown on a table with somebody in the next room preparing to put their hands on you. In my case, it was slightly easier because I knew her, but it was still an issue of vulnerability. I am not sure why it was such a bruise to my ego, but I have since discussed this with her. She was confused: to a massage therapist, the body is a sacred thing no matter what it looks like, and a professional massage therapist does not distinguish one body type from another. She also reassured me that she is thorough, but would expose as little of the naked body as possible. Looking back on my first massage with her, I found her to be true to her word.

Mustering as much of my pride as I could, I took off my underwear and lay facedown on the table. The massage table was an

experience in itself. The sheets were as comfortable as they looked. Gently, I nestled my head in the face cradle and assessed my surroundings. My vision was limited to the carpet. I could only hear the soothing music. The scent of incense pleasantly released my sinuses. But it was the position my body was in that was really surprising: I can only describe it as perfect. The face cradle kept my back in a natural position. My spine itself was straight, but the ergonomics of the table allowed the necessary curvatures to settle into their correct positions. My arms lay naturally by my sides, palms up.

When Kathleen returned, she slipped a firm pillow underneath my shins and placed a heating pad on my lower back, then left the room again. Even breathing was comfortable in this resting position. The heat on my back was the icing on the cake. She had brought me to heaven and hadn't laid a hand on me yet. After a few minutes of solitary bliss, I heard her reenter the room. During this time, I realized that massage therapy involved more than just rubbing down a body. Simply relaxing in this seclusion is as therapeutic as a day at the beach (without kids). All of the insecurity issues I had faced about being nude dissipated.

Faintly, I heard her rub her hands together to warm the oil she had put on them. "This is going to be good," I thought. At first, however, I found the pressure she was using to be uncomfortable. Her starting point was the middle of my back. She had put a knuckle, or perhaps an elbow, deep into the muscle. There were muscles in that region of my back that I didn't know existed, and she found every one of them. Occasionally her well-oiled hand would run over a muscle, but the majority of the time she kept her movements precise. The actual surface area she was massaging at any given time was rarely larger than a quarter. A whole new set of insecurities set in. My male ego wouldn't allow me to wince or yelp in pain, so I clenched my



The Benefits of Massage and Bodywork

Massage and bodywork can help release chronic muscular tension and pain, improve circulation, increase joint flexibility, reduce mental and physical fatigue and stress, promote faster healing of injured muscular tissue, improve posture, and reduce blood pressure. Massage and bodywork are also known to promote better sleep, improve concentration, reduce anxiety, and create an overall sense of well-being.

muscles tighter, which only made matters worse. Somehow, she knew I was clenching, and asked me about the level of pressure. When I mentioned it was a little too intense, she thanked me for communicating with her and lightened her touch.

A new life skill was taught to me in this moment of need. Against the peaceful background music, she breathed loudly and slowly through her mouth as if to say, “You need to breathe like this.” I followed her lead—with each stroke I exhaled and submitted to her touch. The pain drifted away. The elbow would go deep into my muscles, as I would breathe deeply and submit to the moment. This was something I hadn’t experienced before; there was something mystical about it.

A DIFFERENT STATE

She worked the back of my neck, my upper back, and my tender lower back. During this time, a phenomenon happened which must be explained.

I shut my eyes, and my mind drifted. The pressure intensified, but after learning to control my breath, I fell into what can only be described as a deep sleep that was filled with conscious thoughts. For some reason, I found myself analyzing my day: things I did well, things I wanted to do, and things I could do better. All of the problems I faced in the classroom seemed to melt away. For the first time in a long while, I was focusing on myself.

Once my thoughts became sorted, I found myself on the verge of sleep, but before I could nod off she lifted the sheet on the opposite side high enough to avert her eyes and asked me to turn over on my back. I obliged, and she proceeded to cover me again and start work on my feet.


The final stage of the massage was the back of my head, ears, and face. I remember this part vaguely, only because I was nearly asleep. It was a state of relaxation I hadn’t felt before. At the end of this experience, she placed a hand on my forehead and one on my chest and simply remained still for a few moments, which

she later explained was a way to help my body discover its chi, or vital energy.

I’ve heard stories about people coming out of a massage and feeling immediately revitalized. I didn’t find that to be true. When I came to, I felt tired, and my muscles felt similar to the way they do after I’ve been lifting weights. In all actuality, it was a day or two later before I felt the real benefits of the massage. Mentally, I felt resilient. Students even commented on the glow I emitted. My mind was sharp, and the lesson plans I constructed were masterpieces. For these two reasons alone, I took Kathleen up on implementing a consistent monthly regimen of massage.

A NEW HEALTH-CARE REGIMEN

The benefits of a professional massage cannot accurately be put into words, and to experience it, one obviously has to purchase the service. Too often, we choose not to invest in our bodies, instead investing in what we think are necessities. In my case, there was also the fear of this unknown experience that kept me from ever considering a massage. It always seemed like there were other, more important things to do.

I’ve found that massage is not the self-indulgent activity that spas often advertise. While there is a degree of physical pleasure with massage, the euphoria that follows for weeks makes a person more diligent and aware of his surroundings—that’s why I’ve made it a regular part of my health-care strategy. Taking the time to step away from everything isn’t self-indulgence or a luxury; rather, it is more like a tool of peace, which allows people to focus on their vision of the world they live in and their place within it. 

Sam Tudor is a high school English teacher, an aspiring writer, and a father of two amazing kids. He lives in beautiful Bigfork, Montana.

After a Massage or Bodywork Session

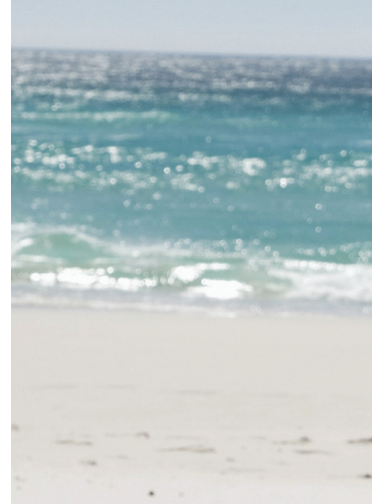
Most people feel very relaxed after a massage or bodywork appointment. Some experience freedom from long-term aches and pains developed from tension or repetitive activity. After an initial period of feeling slowed down, people often experience increased energy, heightened awareness, and greater productivity, which can last for days.



Mini-Meditations

Unlock the Benefits of Bodywork

By Kathy Gruver



We know we are what we eat, but have you considered you are also what you think? Most people go to a massage therapist for stress reduction and relaxation. You want your pain to decrease, your tension to melt away, and your body to relax. But what if you can help the process along simply by changing your words and thoughts?

Studies have shown that stress slows wound healing, increases heart rate and blood pressure, and even seems to speed aging. People with negative outlooks tend to have negative life outcomes, and it's been shown that affirmations and creative visualization contribute to better health and quicker healing. Massage addresses so much of our physical bodies, but here are a few suggestions that you can bring to mind during your next massage to enhance lasting effects, decrease stress, and benefit your emotional body, too.

THE STRESS RESPONSE

First, we need to examine the stress response and how it affects our bodies. The stress response is a very important evolutionary process that evolved as our alarm to danger. This fight-or-flight response creates a cascade of hormones that affects brain function, digestion, heart function, muscle tone, and more. The opposite of that reaction is the relaxation response, which calms the stress response and releases feel-good hormones. The stress response was very beneficial in warning us against immediate danger, like a saber-toothed tiger, but our modern-day stresses are not as dynamic. It's not a saber-toothed tiger threatening our lives; it's the economy, the Internal Revenue Service, job insecurities, family pressures, our boss, and other daily stresses that never seem to subside.

When we don't get a break from our reaction to that stress, it starts to manifest as a problem in the body. Studies have shown that increasing the relaxation response not only slows heart rate, decreases blood pressure, and lowers cholesterol, it also slows the genetic expression of aging. That's right—relax more, age slower.

THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

So, what types of things invoke the relaxation response? Getting a massage, of course, but affirmations, breath work, qigong, meditation, tai chi, yoga, and visualization

are some other things we can do for ourselves. Let's see how you can incorporate some of these techniques into your massage, starting with meditation. When we think of meditation, we picture someone sitting perfectly still on a cushion, eyes closed, hands on her lap, perhaps chanting. But there is a simple form of meditation called the “mini” that takes just a few minutes to do.

There have been several times that I've taken a minute or two before a bodywork session to do a mini with clients and help them relax. I say, “You seem a little stressed today. Would it be OK if we took a few minutes before the massage to help you relax?” You, as the client, can do the same thing. Let your therapist know that you are feeling particularly stressed and give it a shot. Sit comfortably in a chair and use one of the following scripts.

Mini #1: Countdown

Count very slowly to yourself from 10 down to zero, one number on each out breath. Breathe in deeply, and on your first out breath say, “10” to yourself. Repeat, and with the next out breath, say “nine,” working your way down to zero. When you get to zero, notice how you feel.

Mini #2: Up and Down

As you breathe in, count slowly up to four; as you breathe out, count slowly back down to one. As you breathe in, say quietly to yourself, “One ... two ... three ... four,” and as you breathe out, say quietly to yourself, “Four ... three ... two ... one.” Do this several times.

Mini #3: Square Breathing

On the in breath, visualize a vertical line and then a horizontal line. On the out breath, visualize another vertical line and horizontal line, completing a square.

(These are just a few versions of minis that I'm providing here, compliments of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind-Body Medicine; www.massgeneral.org/bhi/.)




Taking this short preliminary step to prep you for the massage to follow will relax you even more. Of course, you can augment this so you do it during the first few minutes of the massage and it can be just as effective. For myself, I use this technique when in traffic, a few times a day when I feel like I need a little vacation, and sometimes even during a massage when the client is particularly quiet. I use that time to quiet my own mind by repeating, (inhale) “I am” (exhale) “pure health.”

If you think this is something you might want to incorporate into your massage time, let your therapist know that you’d like an extra minute or two to get ready in the treatment room before he enters, or that you’d like the first five minutes of the massage to be quiet time so that you can do your mini. Remember, the only time they don’t work is when you don’t do them.

VISUALIZE RELAXATION

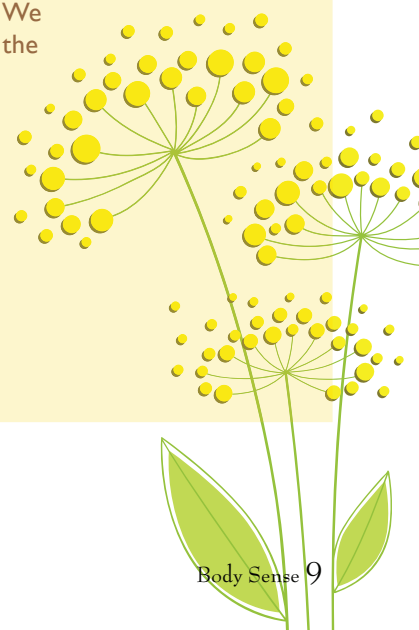
Another thing that can help you relax during your massage is visualization. If you can picture the muscle the therapist is working on and imagine it melting or softening, it can help with the treatment. If you’re having a relaxing Swedish massage, picture your body melting into the table or turning to jelly. If you want to visualize during your massage, let your therapist know that you’d like quiet time during the massage; perhaps she could even lead you through a visualization while you’re on the table. There are many stock scripts, or you could write your own to use for your treatment.

The next time you have a massage, try a mini, work in some visualization, and make sure you share any injuries and needs with your therapist. Incorporating your mind during bodywork can create an even more enjoyable and relaxing experience. 

Kathy Gruver, PhD, is a massage therapist, Reiki Master, and public speaker. She’s been involved in healing since 1990. Contact her at www.healingcirclemassage.com.

Finding Your Voice

During your massage, finding your voice is incredibly important for relaxation. Have you tried to struggle through a massage where the aromatherapy was too strong, you were cold, or you had to use the bathroom? It’s not a fun or relaxing experience. If you are cold, hot, uncomfortable, can’t stand the music, or the pressure is wrong, you need to communicate that to the therapist. Make sure you are very specific about any injuries or concerns you have. There is nothing worse than doing a foot massage on someone who forgot to mention she kicked the dining room table that morning. We need to know about injuries to protect you and give you the safest and most pleasurable experience we can. We, as therapists, are here for you. We will gladly adjust room temperature or music if it will make you feel more comfortable. Believe me, you won’t hurt our feelings. We want you to have the best experience possible so you’ll come back.



Sleep Problems Triple Risk for Fibromyalgia

If you're not getting restful sleep, you might be putting yourself at risk for fibromyalgia, according to a study by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Women who experience frequent sleep disturbances and insomnia develop the painful condition at a rate three times greater than those who sleep more soundly. (Nearly 90 percent of those who suffer from fibromyalgia are women.) While a lack of sleep has not been shown to cause fibromyalgia, it does increase inflammation and reduce the body's ability to manage pain. The study was published online in *Arthritis & Rheumatism*.



Smartphone, Smart Eating

New smartphone apps are making it easier than ever to watch what you eat. Fooducate, a free app available at the Android Marketplace and the iTunes App Store, allows you to scan barcodes and immediately access valuable information, including calories per serving, healthier alternatives, and a helpful letter grade. For the iPhone, The Eatery app lets users take pictures of their meals and upload them to an online community where they are then rated based on healthiness. The free apps were both named Top 10 iPhone Medical Apps of 2011 by Apple.

Ten Foods for Fiber

Do you get enough fiber? If not, you may be putting yourself at a higher risk for diabetes and heart disease. Check out some of these recommendations for more fiber from Health.com.

Avocados
Beans
Broccoli
Brown rice
Corn
Oatmeal
Pears
Peas
Raspberries
Whole-wheat pasta



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Stand Up for Your Life

By Darren Buford
Managing Editor, *Body Sense*

A recent trend has office employees ditching their desk chairs and taking to their feet: stand-working. Turns out that sitting all day, every day, can be downright dangerous. Sitting weakens the body's muscles and increases one's risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes, as well as metabolic symptoms.

Changeable workstations equipped with lifts or hydraulics present an alternative to sitting. They can transition from a desk that fits a chair to a desk that perfectly matches your standing height, giving you the ability to move from a standing position to a sitting position throughout the day.

Standing while working has many benefits, including increasing the blood flow to your brain, which, in turn, increases concentration and creativity. It has been estimated that standing requires 20 percent more energy than sitting and may burn 200-plus calories per day.

If stand-working isn't an option at your office, try getting up whenever possible and stretching or going for a short walk. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, or walk to speak to your coworkers rather than sending emails.

Strengthen Your Posture


Sit Stronger to Control Back Pain

By Steven Weiniger

If you have back pain, you probably know your posture isn't good. If you sit for much of your waking day, you're training your body to be slumped over into folded, or "weak," posture. However, even though you may never be perfectly straight, there are ways to relieve your pain by strengthening your posture.

Low-back pain from sitting is a result of mechanical stress on the body. This is called poor biomechanics. When the body is not mechanically well aligned, posture, and therefore balance, is weak. When you stand up with weak posture, the simple act of balancing will overwork some muscles and cause stress on joints. The key to reducing this strain is to improve balance and the ability to control how you balance, and to retrain muscles and nerves for less pain and better function.

Step one toward stronger posture is improving the symmetry of how your body moves on each side. In fact, just changing the position from which you move can help free up locked and stiff joints, resulting in stronger posture and less pain.

The Sitting Leg-Cross Stretch (below) is an easy back and hip stretch you can do at your desk. You can use your office chair or, if you want to challenge yourself, do the stretch while sitting on an exercise ball. 

Steven Weiniger, DC, is the author of Stand Taller—Live Longer: An Anti-Aging Strategy. He created the StrongPosture exercise programs taught by certified posture exercise professionals, chiropractors, physical therapists, massage therapists, and other body professionals who promote the importance of posture. For more StrongPosture information, visit www.bodyzone.com.



Rick Giese Photography

Daily Posture Exercise

Sit tall and strong on the front edge of a chair or ball, as you cross your left leg over the right knee. Pull your belly in to brace your core. As you breathe out, keep your head and shoulders aligned as you pull your body forward. Take 2–3 breaths, and come up with your posture still strong. Repeat on the other side.