

# YOUR HEALING KNEADS

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## What Massage Can Do For You

### Beyond Pain Relief, Massage is Valuable for Preventive Care

Karrie Osborn

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Whether it is an aching back, recovery from an injury, a case of carpal tunnel syndrome, or a host of other debilitating physiological conditions, there's no doubt massage and bodywork works to relieve pain. But once your therapist has helped you tackle your pain, do you quit calling? When the pain is gone, are you gone, too?

Massage therapy is highly effective for pain relief, but it is an amazing preventive therapy as well. Massage helps build and maintain a healthy body (and mind), it combats stress, and it works to

Massage can play an important role in a good health-care regimen. Just as you eat healthily, exercise regularly, and take your vitamins to ward off illness and maintain a fit body, you should consider making frequent massage a part of your wellness lifestyle.

According to Benny Vaughn, a sports massage expert in Fort Worth, Texas, one of the benefits of consistent and regular massage therapy is better flexibility. "This happens because regular and structured touch stimulus enhances the nervous system's sensory and spatial processing capacity," he says. "That is, the person becomes more aware of her body's movement in space and becomes more aware of tightness or

*Hearty laughter is a good way to jog internally without having to go outdoors.*

-Norman Cousins



Massage helps you maintain a healthy body.

keep the immune system strong. In short, massage can keep on working for you, even after the pain is gone.

#### MASSAGE FOR WELLNESS

If it's been a while since you booked your last massage--because your pain is no longer an issue or your injury is fully rehabbed--you might want to consider massage for preventive care.

pain long before it reaches a critical point of mechanical dysfunction."

As a preventive measure, frequent massage puts you more in tune with your body. "The consistency of massage therapy over time creates a cumulative stress-reduction effect," Vaughn says.

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#### Office Hours and Contact

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"The person becomes acutely aware of stress within her body long before it can create stress-driven damage."

And the more massage you receive, the more benefits you reap. "Massage therapists know that people who get massage regularly demonstrate greater improvement and notice a reduction in pain and muscular tension, as well as an improvement in posture," says Anne Williams, author of *Massage Mastery: From Student to Professional* (Lippincott Williams Wilkins, 2012).

"People regularly make a commitment to fitness," Williams says. "People regularly make a commitment to changing their diet. The difference they'd experience if they regularly made a commitment to massage is mind-blowing."

#### STRESS IS A KILLER

Stress is more than just a word we throw around to describe the nature of our hectic day. Today, we understand that stress kills.

According to the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, 60-90 percent of all US medical visits are for stress-related disorders. Chronic pain, headaches, heart disease, hypertension, and ulcers can all be wrought from stress. Many would argue that the best benefit of massage is its ability to reduce the stress in our lives.

From the perspective of daily living, think about the stress you felt at today's meeting--now it's hiding in your neck. Tomorrow that can turn into stiffness and eventually begin to affect other parts of your body. If you see your massage therapist for your regular session this week, the chances are good you won't reach the tipping point. Think of massage and bodywork as a way to rebalance your body.

Noted researcher Tiffany Field and her colleagues from the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine report that massage causes positive biological changes when it comes to stress. Through the course of more than 20 studies, these scientists found that massage decreases cortisol (a stress-derived hormone that negatively affects immune function and kills our immune cells) and increases dopamine

and serotonin (the neurotransmitters most associated with emotional well-being).

Add to this the research that shows massage can lower your heart rate and decrease your blood pressure, and you have a mighty effective, nonpharmacological, stress-fighting tool that's about as natural as natural can get.

#### A ONE-HOUR VACATION AND SO MUCH MORE

You may no longer need to rehab that knee or work the scar tissue from your surgery, but don't forget about everything else massage can do for you. Massage is the entire package, helping to heal body, mind, and spirit. Think of it as a one-hour vacation with amazing return on investment.

Whether it be maintaining joint

flexibility, managing blood pressure, or enhancing immunity, massage works. From repair to relief and from recovery to relaxation, massage is a magnificent piece of natural medicine you should always have as part of your health-care routine.

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**Regular massage helps reduce stress and improve your quality of life.**

# What is Qi?

A fundamental concept of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) dating back over 3,000 years, qi (pronounced "chee") is the Chinese word for energy, which also carries with it connotations of air, breath, and life force.

In TCM, it is understood that everything from humans and animals to rocks and trees is filled with qi. This energy facilitates function, communication, and connection and is the uniting force of the universe, as well as the animating life force in all objects.

## Qi in the Body

Qi flows through the body via 14 meridian channels, which run either up or down throughout the body along specific pathways. These pathways deliver energy to organs, structures, and systems in a constant pattern, and when qi is flowing unimpeded along these meridians, a person is said to be in balance.

Illness, injury, stress, and other trauma

can cause blockages along these meridians, thus impairing or stopping the flow of qi and resulting in energy congestion. Several TCM techniques are designed to clear these blockages and restore balance and flow to the body's energy.

## Working with Qi

Along each meridian are points, known as acupoints or pressure points, where these energy blockages are likely to occur. Significant acupoints are also known as trigger points, and these are often starting points for therapists working to clear congested qi.

An important principle of qi is that clearing blockages at certain trigger points will help restore flow and thus impact parts of the body that are connected along the various meridians. For example, this could mean that working on someone's foot might benefit an internal organ like the liver, or benefit his or her heart. This concept further illustrates that qi in the body is

one balanced system in which one imbalance can affect several body parts and even alter emotional states.



Keeping qi in balance.

# Yogurt, the Super Food

## Balance Digestion, Improve Immunity, and Prevent Disease

In some form, yogurt has existed since at least 2000 BCE, and many food historians believe it predates recorded history, possibly going back as far as 9000 BCE. Why such staying power? A bit of a wonder food, yogurt improves digestion, which can boost immunity and even help prevent colon cancer. One dairy product even most lactose intolerant people can eat, yogurt is loaded with active bacterial cultures, the key ingredients that make it so healthy.

While we typically think of bacteria as dangerous bugs that cause disease and infection, the body is host to billions of bacteria that live in the intestines and help digest the foods we eat. These good bacteria, or microflora, actually fight off the bad bacteria that cause illness.

Some of these same good bacterial

species are used to ferment milk, and it's these cultures that give yogurt its texture and tart flavor. They also process much of the milk sugar, called lactose, during fermentation, which is why yogurt usually doesn't bother people with lactose intolerance.

Eating yogurt helps maintain the microflora in the gut, optimizing digestion and keeping harmful bacteria in check. Ever noticed how a course of antibiotics is often followed by a bout of diarrhea? This is because antibiotics kill off all the bacteria in the gut--the bad stuff and the good--leaving the gastrointestinal tract compromised. Fortunately, yogurt can help counteract this imbalance.

Furthermore, this food is a good source of nutrients, including B vitamins,

calcium, magnesium, and phosphorus. Whole milk yogurt also contains conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), an essential fatty acid with cancer fighting properties, especially beneficial in preventing breast and colon cancers. And CLA has been shown to increase fat metabolism, helping the body convert fat to lean muscle.

Maintaining the good bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract is key to healthy digestion, and eating quality yogurt is a great way to do this. Be sure to read the labels and choose varieties that contain live active cultures to ensure you're getting the most from your yogurt.

*A truly strong  
person does not  
need the  
approval of  
others any more  
than a lion  
needs the  
approval of  
sheep.*

-Vernon Howard

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