

## Helping Children Find Focus

### Massage Calms ADHD Kids

Cathy Ulrich

Imagine lying on a massage table. As your massage therapist sets to work, you feel your body relax. Your muscles soften, your nervous system calms. Now, imagine how you feel when the massage is over--relaxed, alert, calm, and content.

Anyone who has gotten a massage understands the many benefits that it offers. Massage is usually reserved for adults--or sometimes infants--but what about massage for kids and adolescents? If massage helps calm the body and improve alertness, how might it help kids with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)? Can children and teenagers who can't sit still benefit from massage?

the rate of diagnosis for girls has been rising as well, and girls who are diagnosed have the same level of impairment as boys.

Kids with ADHD show difficulty holding attention and display impulsive behaviors and overactivity levels beyond what might be expected for their age group. They typically show poorer academic performance, have difficulty in social settings, and can't adapt as well emotionally as kids without ADHD. Studies show that a diagnosis of ADHD puts kids at higher risk for delinquent behaviors and substance abuse. Other diagnoses such as learning disabilities, mood disorders, and anxiety disorders are often seen in the same children.



Many kids with ADHD who receive massage say they are happier and more confident.

### Understanding ADHD

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, is rapidly rising as the most common psychiatric diagnostic label for children. Anywhere from 3-7 percent of all school-age children and adolescents may have it, and it is one of the primary causes of behavioral problems in general pediatric settings. Nine boys are diagnosed with ADHD for every girl, but

### Medical Treatments

Now a household name, the drug Ritalin is the most common medication prescribed for children diagnosed with ADHD. In fact, it's the most common drug prescribed for any childhood disorder. It's been estimated that more

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*"To change our lives, we must first change our minds."*

-Author Unknown

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than five million school-age children take Ritalin annually.

Known to stimulate areas of the brain associated with attention, arousal, and inhibition, Ritalin seems to help improve ADHD symptoms in about 75 percent of cases, but its effects last only as long as it's taken, and it does produce side-effects. Nervousness, headaches, sleeplessness, and rapid heart rate are sometimes seen with its use, and overdose can produce severe effects such as agitation, hallucinations, high blood pressure, seizures, heart arrhythmias, and psychosis. In addition, studies are only now being conducted on long-term effects.

Ritalin, as well as other psychostimulant drugs, can be effective in improving attention span and modifying behaviors associated with ADHD, but kids need to be monitored carefully for side effects and appropriate dosage.

## Massage for ADHD

Two recent studies conducted by the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami reported that regular massage therapy can be an effective treatment for kids with ADHD. One study found adolescent boys who received ten 15-minute daily massages were observed by their teachers to be more focused in their schoolwork, and they fidgeted less. In addition, the children rated themselves as happier than those who participated in a relaxation therapy program.

Another study involved kids aged 7-18, 20 percent of whom were girls. Each subject received a 20-minute massage twice a week. They showed immediate improvement in their moods and longer-term behavioral improvement in the classroom. They also reported feeling happier and their teachers found them to be more attentive.

In adult studies, massage has been shown to reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol, helping to mitigate the active fight-or-flight response. Massage also helps improve math computation performance and raises alertness levels, as measured on electroencephalograms (EEGs). Finally, massage decreases depression and increases mental focus. The same effects are seen in children and teenagers with ADHD.

## The Details

Incorporating professional massage into your child's routine may help him to develop an age-appropriate ability to focus, a calmer disposition, and even increased confidence. Studies report that two 20-minute massages a week are enough to show significant improvement in ADHD children. Because these kids have trouble staying still for prolonged periods, they better tolerate shorter, more frequent massages.

For massage on children with ADHD, a practitioner generally uses simple, moderate-pressure strokes to the child's head/neck, arms, torso, legs, and back. Dividing time between these areas--say four minutes each--will address the full body and is enough to get the desired effect. Most kids do fine fully clothed.

A comfortable bed, chair, or table in a quiet room is best. For parents seeking

skilled bodywork for their kids, chair massage is a great choice, done with the child fully clothed and for about 20-30 minutes at a time.

In addition, supplementing with home massages between professional sessions can also be useful. Talk to your massage therapist about private massage lessons for you. She can teach you simple, effective techniques to use on your child when frequent visits to the massage therapist may not be practical.

By adding massage to your child's routine, you're giving him much needed physical contact and helping to calm his nervous system, which will pay dividends in his ability to do school work, interact with peers and teachers, and be happier in general. And if you're massaging your child yourself, you'll create the opportunity for a stronger emotional bond between the two of you.



Bodywork helps children with ADHD succeed in the classroom, boosting self-esteem.

# Pre-Session Yoga Moves for Calm

Mary Beth Braun

It's one of those mornings. Your alarm didn't go off and you have an appointment in an hour. How can you quickly collect and calm yourself enough to be fully present for the day ahead? Breath and yoga.

## BREATH

Take this time to center and calm yourself. Start by channeling your yoga instructor or massage therapist and begin with breath (pranayama): inhaling to the count of three and exhaling to the count of six. Do this three times and move on to do a few yoga poses (asanas).

## YOGA

You remember a few basic yoga poses from class, right? Try these two: simple seated twist and standing half moon.

## SIMPLE SEATED TWIST

Continuing to use your breath, sit on the floor in an easy, cross-legged pose and begin simple seated twist. Raise the crown of your head to the ceiling, elongating your neck and spine. Inhale

and exhale, then twist to the left. Exhaling, move through center, and repeat on the right, continuing to inhale and exhale.

## STANDING HALF MOON, BIKRAM STYLE

From there, step your right foot forward, followed by your left foot, and slowly roll up one vertebrae at a time until you are standing upright with your feet firmly grounded into the earth.

Feeling your feet firmly grounded, raise your hands overhead, taking the wrinkles out of your neck and elongating your spine. Inhale, exhale, and side bend to the right. Once there, exhale and feel your side body open up as you press your foot into the earth to enhance the stretch. Inhaling through center, exhale and bend to the left. Return to your center and take one more deep breath in and out.

You feel better, right? Now, let go of that harried morning and begin your day fully present and centered.

Mary Beth Braun is a certified massage therapist based in Indianapolis, Indiana.



Channel your inner yoga instructor.

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# Be Immune to Inactivity

The World Health Organization has called inactivity the second-leading risk factor for non-communicable diseases and the fourth-leading risk factor for global mortality.

In the United States, inactivity has helped contribute to the fact that 35.9 percent of adults age 20 years and over are obese, as well as 18 percent of adolescents and children ages 6-19.

With risk factors like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, coronary artery disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and more, it's important to make sure you get enough exercise and activity to stay healthy.

Here are some tips to help you keep moving.

## Be Aerobic Every Day

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends getting 2.5 hours of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise each week. If you break it down, that's just over 20 minutes a day of activities like walking, water aerobics, riding a bike, or pushing a lawnmower.

Want to cut that down even further? If you bump the exercise up to vigorous intensity, you can cut the time in half. Vigorous-intensity activities include jogging or running, swimming laps, and playing basketball or tennis.

## Add Muscle-Strengthening

Lifting weights, working with resistance bands, and doing body-weight resistance exercises, heavy yard work, or yoga are all considered by the CDC to be important muscle-strengthening

activities. The recommendation is to get this type of exercise at least twice a week to the point where your muscles are tired.

If you focus on setting realistic goals and getting just a bit of exercise each day, you'll be on your way to meeting the requirements in no time. Find exercises and activities that you enjoy doing, and it won't seem like such a burden. Plus, you'll feel great about reducing the risk factors associated with a sedentary lifestyle. So get a plan, get out there, and get moving!

*"Education  
breeds  
confidence.  
Confidence  
breeds hope.  
Hope breeds  
peace."*

-Author Unknown

EveryBODY ready for Spring? The warmth allows your muscles to relax after the cold constricting winter. Welcoming the aromatherapy of blossoming flowers, trees, fruits, herbs, vegetables and other greenery. Let's get outside to exercise our BODY and please be mindful. What's your plan? Happy Spring, Julia

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