

Making the Most of Your Massage

How to Prolong the Benefits of Bodywork

Barbara Hey

A massage works in wonderful ways, easing stress and pain, calming the nervous system, increasing circulation, loosening tight muscles, stimulating internal organs, and enhancing skin. The multiplicity of physiological responses sends a simple, clear message to the mind: Massage feels good. Of course, you want to hold on to that just-had-a-massage feeling -- total body relaxation, muscles relaxed and at ease, and fluid movement restored -- for as long as possible.

But how long that bliss lasts depends on the state of your body. If you're suffering from chronic pain or recovering from injury, then it may take more sessions and perhaps different

Massage Frequency

How often you receive massage depends on why you're seeking massage. In dealing with the general tension of everyday commutes, computer work, and time demands, a monthly massage may be enough to sustain you. On the other hand, if you're seeking massage for chronic pain, you may need regular treatments every week or two. Or if you're addressing an acute injury or dealing with high levels of stress, you may need more frequent sessions. Your situation will dictate the optimum time between treatments, and your practitioner will work with you to determine the best course of action.



The more often you receive massage, the more therapeutic it becomes.

modalities before optimal health is restored.

If massage is part of your regular health regimen, then it's more likely the effects will endure. In other words, the effects of massage are cumulative, like any healthy habit. The more often you get a massage, the greater and longer-lasting the benefits.

"You need to consider how you felt before the session and how you felt after, and then look at how long you maintain that," says Pieter Sommen, the chair of the eastern department in the Swedish Institute School of Massage Therapy in New York.

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"There is no limit to what can be accomplished when no one cares who gets credit."

-John Wooden

Office Hours and Contact

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In general, experts say "regular" is preferable, but how regular depends on your situation. While daily massage would be delightful, practical considerations such as cost, time, and physical need likely determine the frequency of treatments. "It's best to maintain a schedule," says Eeris Kallil, CMT, a shiatsu instructor at the Boulder College of Massage Therapy in Colorado. "That way the body becomes conditioned and prepared for session at specific intervals."

Maintenance

Whether you get a massage weekly, monthly, or just every once in a while, the following habits can maximize and extend the afterglow of treatment.

WATER

One bit of advice you'll hear over and over again is to drink plenty of water after a massage. Bodywork -- no matter the particular modality -- releases toxins, such as lactic acid and carbonic acid, that need to be flushed from the body. Massage also promotes circulation, increasing blood flow and oxygen and stimulating the lymphatic system, which helps rid the body of pathogens. After-massage hydration supports these functions, helping to eliminate released impurities, sooner rather than later.

STRETCHING

Another helpful habit is stretching between massages to maintain joint mobility, prevent muscles from tightening up again, and keeping the life energy flowing. This may mean doing yoga or whatever specific or full-body stretches suggested by your practitioner. After a shiatsu session, for example, your practitioner may recommend "makko-ho" stretches, a series of six exercises designed to keep energy circulating. "This series of stretches take anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes a day, but really help keep the chi flowing through the body," says Kallil.

EXERCISE

Working out can also help maintain the benefits of massage, and this habit should be continually cultivated. However, if you're receiving massage therapy to help speed muscle strain recovery, you may need to ease up on the exercise for a while and give the body time to heal -- particularly if you're

recovering from a strenuous body-pummeling training regimen. "You don't want to over-work your body," says Kallil. That is, if running is taking a toll, try something more gentle and meditative such as swimming, walking, or tai chi.

BODY AWARENESS

After a massage, respect how your body feels. If your body seems to ask for rest, give in to that demand. This may mean backing off the to-do list, taking it easy, moving slower, and perhaps doing less for a while. And don't allow yourself to get fatigued because it will undermine the effects of massage. Get sufficient sleep to allow the body to absorb the effects and regain vitality.

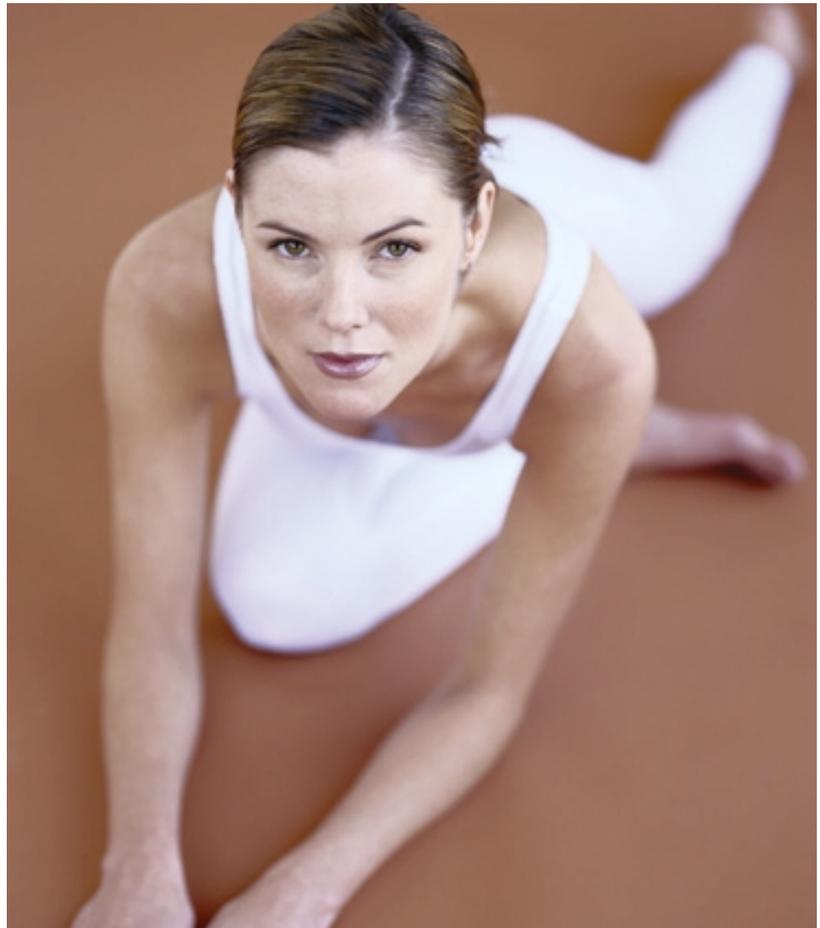
DIET

Finally, since you've just rid the body of toxins, support the body's renewed state by adhering to a healthy diet rich in

fruits and vegetables, which will continue the detoxification process. Lay off the espresso and all adrenaline-challenges for a time -- which would short-circuit relaxation anyway -- and enjoy the calm.

The benefits of massage are many, including: increasing circulation, allowing the body to pump more oxygen and nutrients throughout the body; stimulating lymph flow and boosting immunity; relaxing overused or tight muscles; increasing joint mobility and range of motion; reducing recovery time after strenuous workouts or surgery; and relieving back pain and migraines, just to name a few.

After receiving a massage, clients feel rejuvenated, relaxed, and refreshed. By opting for a few lifestyle choices, you can extend these benefits and get the most out of your massage.



Stretching between massages helps maintain relaxed muscles, joint mobility, and energy flow.

A Walking Workout

Have Fun While Burning More Calories

Imagine the lone hiker, backpack laden with sleeping bag and bedroll, wielding a well-worn walking stick as she climbs the side of a snow-covered mountain. For centuries, trekkers have used walking sticks, partly as a defense against attacking wildlife, partly to aid in balance, and partly as support on long, arduous climbs. But in recent years, many hikers have replaced the single wooden walking stick with hiking poles.

Held in both hands and used to distribute weight more evenly through the four limbs, wilderness hikers have found poles invaluable for safety, efficiency, and comfort on long hikes. What wilderness hikers have known for some time now is that walking poles are a great way to relieve pressure on knees, ankles, and the back. They encourage better posture and provide a total body workout by engaging the upper body.

Now, hiking poles are showing up in urban areas as fitness walkers discover the benefits they provide. Nordic

walking--similar in technique to cross-country skiing--is a great way to get a whole body workout, increase oxygen consumption, and burn more calories than regular walking or even speed walking. This total body workout burns 40 percent more calories and consumes 25 percent more oxygen. Poles can be purchased at most outdoor sporting stores, along with rubber tips for use on paved paths.

TECHNIQUE

Adjust your poles to approximately 70 percent of your height and loosely secure the straps around your wrists. Hold the poles at an angle behind you so they propel you forward with a slight bend at the elbow. Use an opposite hand-and-heel motion as you walk--right heel strikes as left pole tip contacts the ground. And you're on your way! Don't be shy with your poles. Remember: You're burning 40 percent more calories.

For more information, visit

www.walking.about.com/od/nordicwalking/index.htm.



Add walking poles, and burn more calories.

Flotation Tanks

Brandon Twyford

If you want to take the concept of completely stopping even further, try totally unplugging from the noise of everyday life in a flotation tank.

Developed in 1954 to test the effects of sensory deprivation, the flotation tank is now used in a range of restorative and healing practices, including recovery from exercise or injury. It is also an effective tool for visualization techniques.

The tank contains water heated to the exact temperature of the skin--thereby removing the sense of touch--and 800-1,000 pounds of Epsom salt for buoyancy. The result is a unique sensation that's completely unlike floating in a pool. It's more like floating in space. When we float in a normal pool, or even when we are asleep in bed, tiny muscles throughout our body are constantly working to adjust and support

us. The flotation tank, however, allows you to completely let go.

I first experienced floating in 2006 on the recommendation of a friend. The idea sounded intriguing to me, so I decided to try it out by booking a session at my local yoga studio. I disrobed, put my earplugs in, and climbed into the tank. I laid back, stretched out, and closed my eyes.

Total isolation. The thoughts in my head, previously a subconscious presence of constant background noise, were suddenly deafening. I opened my eyes into pitch-black darkness. I was momentarily disoriented, and it took several minutes before I was able to consciously allow my body and mind to relax. As I did, I felt the dense water support every inch of my body.

At the end of the one-hour session, I was still discovering parts of my body

where I had unconsciously been holding tension. The nape of my neck. My ankles. My ears. My hips. Places I hadn't even known I was using when my body was at rest. As I consciously let go of each of these body parts, I slipped further into a state of total physical relaxation. By the time I left the tank, my body felt more relaxed than it had in years.

Flotation tanks can be found in most cities, often as an auxiliary service at a yoga studio or wellness center, and an hour-long session runs about \$40-\$60. Until the average person can hitch a ride into space, this is as close as we'll get to experiencing total removal from the constant barrage of external stimuli on our overworked senses.

Lie back, close your eyes, and unplug. *Brandon Twyford is assistant editor for Associated Bodywork Massage Professionals.*

*"We cannot
achieve more in
life than what
we believe in our
heart of hearts
we deserve to
have."*

-James R. Ball

A wonderful time of year for vacationing, however, please remember to get some rest, hydrate your body and stretch out too:) I look forward to seeing you soon! Best Regards,
Julia

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