FAMILY & FRIENDS

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Massage Multiplied

Benefits of Massage Improve with Frequency

Karrie Osborn

What kind of massage client are you? Do you make an appointment after someone has given you a massage gift certificate? Do you try to get in every now and then for a stress-relieving tune-up? Or do you see your therapist religiously--once a week, every three weeks, once a month?

While getting a massage--regardless of how often--is incredibly beneficial to your body and mind, getting frequent massage treatments is even more powerful as a healthcare ally.

"People who get massage regularly demonstrate a reduction in pain and muscular tension and an improvement in posture," says Anne Williams, author of Spa Bodywork: A Guide for Massage Therapists (Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2006).

"People regularly make a commitment to fitness. 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," she says.

Stress Killer

One way in which frequent massage can improve our quality of life is by alleviating stress. Experts say most disease is stress-related, and nothing ages us faster--inside or out--than the effects of stress. As stress-related diseases continue to claim more lives every year, the increasingly deadly role stress plays in modern-day life is painfully clear.

Massage is a great way to take charge and reverse the situation. Mary Beth Braun and Stephanie Simonson, authors of Introduction to Massage Therapy (Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2007), explain the benefits of massage therapy in the simplest of terms: "Healing input influences healing output." They note that frequent massage can reduce the accumulation of stress and improve overall health. "The benefits of massage are cumulative," they write.

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Regularly scheduled massage has proven a powerful ally in health and wellness.

"Whoever is happy will make others happy too."
-Mark Twain

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This being the case, it only makes sense that those aches and pains you see your massage therapist for might disappear faster, stay away longer, or even go away altogether with more frequent visits. Stress might never reach those physiologically detrimental levels where the immune system is suppressed or the nervous system is sent into an alarm state if you are able to receive stress-relieving bodywork with some consistency. Not only would your body benefit by regularly unleashing its aches and pains instead of adapting to them, but your mind would have time to wash away the stresses of a life lived in overdrive. Both are critical pieces for living well.

Experts say the body and mind can learn to live more calmly, more efficiently, and more healthfully when frequent massage shows the way. That makes for a healthier whole, allowing us to continue to live life at its fullest, even as we deal with each new stress or challenge.

Preventive Measures

In so many ways, massage is preventive health care. Yes, it can address injuries, scar tissue, and chronic pain, as well as provide relief for cancer patients and reduce hospitalization for premature babies, among many other valuable benefits (go to Massagetherapy.com for more information on the myriad benefits of massage). But when the healthy, and trying-to-be-healthy, among us seek out massage on a regular basis, it helps us live a proactively healthier life.

Since bodywork influences every system in the body, there are enormous possibilities created by increasing the frequency in which you address those systems. It's best to discuss your session goals with your massage therapist and together devise a plan of frequency that meets your needs, while taking into account your therapist's best advice.

Body Awareness

According to Benny Vaughn, sports massage expert and owner of Athletic Therapy Center 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 their body's movement in space and becomes more aware of tightness or pain long before it reaches a critical point of mechanical dysfunction."

Quite simply, 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. "The person becomes acutely aware of stress within their body long before it can create stress-driven damage."

He says the consistency of receiving regular massage therapy has the potential to create a cumulative wellness effect. "Ultimately when one feels good, our whole being follows suit on all other levels--i.e., decision-making is better, processing life events is better, and being happy is easier when you are not in pain or feeling 'heavy' or 'tight.'"

Williams says she's certain people's lives would be changed if they could schedule massage and bodywork more frequently. "I encourage clients to commit to getting massage once a week for a month and then evaluate the results they get," she says. "I guarantee they will become massage enthusiasts for life."

Massage Can...

--Alleviate low-back pain and increase range of motion.
--Create body self-awareness.
--Improve muscle tone and stimulate their nerve supply.
--Improve elasticity of skin and promote skin rejuvenation.
--Improve sleep and calm the mind.
--Increase endorphin and seratonin production.
--Reduce edema, as well as joint inflammation.
--Release negative holding patterns from previous injuries.

A consistent massage routine helps you manage stress before it causes illness.

Cultivating a Gardening Habit

Discover the Health Benefits of Yard Work

Feeling the need to exercise, clean up your diet, meditate? Want to be more creative, get out and meet people, enjoy the outdoors, and slow down? There's one activity in which you can accomplish all of these objectives: gardening.

Encouraging Exercise

Studies show that vigorous digging burns 500 calories an hour, weeding burns 210 calories, and mowing the lawn burns 400 calories. As a moderate exercise, gardening has been found to decrease the risk of heart disease and diabetes, and a study at the University of Arkansas found that gardening was almost as effective as weight lifting in reducing the risk for osteoporosis in women. So instead of taking that indoor aerobics class this summer, try mowing the lawn or planting an herb garden.

As with any exercise regimen, the key is to start at a comfortable pace and gradually work your way up to longer, more difficult activities. Your heart rate should be about the same as when you take a brisk walk.

Improving Your Diet

Gardening will also likely help you eat better. Research shows that people who grow gardens eat more vegetables and fruits than those who don't. Growing fresh herbs, even in a container on the deck or balcony, is another great way to add flavor and freshness to home-cooked meals and an incentive to try new recipes.

Boosting Your Social Life

Gardening can also be quite social. Whether at a garden club, a community garden, or an online forum, people love to share ideas, solve common problems, and connect through mutual interests.

Easing Stress

And finally, gardening is a great way to manage stress. Spending time outside and tuning in to the rhythms of nature, we're reminded to be patient, slow down, and breathe the fresh air. Whether growing flowers, vegetables, or herbs, a garden reminds us of our connection to life and the abundance that nature so freely gives.

Gardening burns calories and improves diet.

Coenzyme Q10

The Wrinkle Cure

Air pollutants, toxins, cigarette smoke, cell metabolism, exposure to the sun, and other environmental factors initiate free radicals, which can cause dangerous reactions that destroy cells and damage DNA, proteins, and fats. Free radicals also interfere with collagen production and integrity, resulting in loss of elasticity and, ultimately, aging skin. Although this is a natural and unavoidable by-product of metabolism, an overabundance of free radical damage can cause premature aging and wrinkles. Fortunately, there's a nutritional way to fight the elements.

Coenzyme Q10, also called CoQ10 and ubiquinone, is a fat soluble, vitamin-like nutrient present in virtually all cells and considered the spark plug of the body, helping to produce and regulate energy as well as fighting free radicals as an antioxidant.

CoQ10 levels are highest during the first 20 years of life and decline with time, so much so that at age 80, CoQ10 levels may be lower than at birth. Yet the body's demand for CoQ10 increases with age. Furthermore, statin (cholesterol-lowering) medications can further deplete the body of CoQ10.

The recommended daily CoQ10 dose is 30 mg, in combination with alpha lipoic acid and vitamins A, C, E, and selenium. Foods highest in CoQ10 include sardines, beef, peanuts, spinach, and albacore tuna. However, it would take a pound of sardines, two pounds of beef, or two-and-a-half pounds of peanuts to provide 30 mg, and cooking foods at high temperatures degrades the enzyme. Consequently, CoQ10 supplementation is likely necessary to achieve therapeutic effects.

CoQ10 can also benefit topically, as it's a small molecule that can easily penetrate the skin. When CoQ10 is combined with vitamins C and E in creams or lotions, the synergistic effect can neutralize free radicals, thus reducing wrinkles.

Supplementing with CoQ10 is not only a good antiaging strategy for the skin, it can also enhance energy, cognition, heart health, stroke prevention, and immune support.

"Sometimes the cure for restlessness is rest."

-Colleen Wainwright

Fall is approaching with cooler temperatures giving us more outdoor time to garden, run, walk, bike, hike and tour. Please stretch those shortened muscles to release your joints:) Ah, what a relief that will be! Enjoy, Julia

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