

## The Power of Touch

### In a High-tech World, It Pays to Reach Out

Nora Brunner

Physician and holistic health pioneer Rachel Naomi Remen once confessed that as a pediatric intern she was an unrepentant baby kisser, often smooching her little patients as she made her rounds at the hospital. She did this when no one was looking because she sensed her colleagues would frown on her behavior, even though she couldn't think of a single reason not to do it.

The lack of basic human contact in our high-tech medical system reflects a larger social ill that has only recently started to get some attention--touch deprivation. The cultural landscape is puzzling. On the one hand, we are saturated in suggestive messages by the

skin-to-skin contact is beneficial to human health, American social norms inhibit this most basic form of human interaction and communication. Despite our supposedly enlightened attitudes, we Americans are among the most touch-deprived people in the world.

"Touch deprivation is a reality in American culture as a whole," writes Reverend Anthony David of Atlanta. "It's not just babies needing to be touched in caring ways, or the sick. It's not just doctors and nurses needing to extend it. It's all of us, needing connection, needing to receive it, needing to give it, with genuine happiness at stake."

*"Dream more  
of becoming  
than of  
obtaining."*

-Author Unknown



High-tech can mean low-touch. Ensure you're getting the tactile connection humans require.

mass media; on the other hand, the caring pediatrician is afraid someone might look askance at her planting a kiss on a baby's forehead. What's wrong with this picture?

### Social Norms

Unfortunately, touch has become, well, a touchy subject. Though there's growing scientific evidence that

### Distant, Disconnected

How did we come to deprive ourselves so tragically? According to Texas psychology professor David R. Cross, PhD, there are three reasons Americans don't touch each other more: fear of sexual innuendo, societal and personal

Continued on page 2

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#### In this Issue

**The Power of Touch**  
**Skin Care Through Changing Seasons**  
**Salt Story**

Continued from page 1

disconnection aided by technology, and the fact that the ill effects of non-touching are simply not that obvious and don't receive much attention.

It's no surprise Americans are often afraid physical touching signals romantic interest, which leads to the twin perils of either having our intentions misunderstood or wondering if someone's gesture is an uninvited advance. This ambiguity is more than enough to scare most people from taking someone's arm or patting them on the back.

The potential for the loaded gesture is further complicated by our litigious society in which unwelcome touch can mean, or be interpreted as, dominance, sexual harassment, or exploitation. People in the helping professions are regularly counseled on how to do their jobs without creating even a hint of ambiguity. In one extreme example, counselors at a children's summer camp were given the advice that when kids proactively hugged them, the counselors were to raise both arms over their heads to show they hadn't invited the contact and weren't participating in it. One wonders how the innocent minds of children will interpret this bizarre response to their spontaneous affection.

Another reason for touch phobia, according to Cross, is that we live in a society with far-flung families and declining community connections. Technology plays a significant role in the way we communicate, and it seems we move farther away from face-to-face communication with every new invention. How ironic that the old telephone company jingle that encouraged us to "Reach Out and Touch Someone" gave way to the slew of electronic devices we have today, all ringing and beeping for our attention. While these devices were invented to improve communication, some people wonder if the net effect is lower quality in our exchanges of information.

While there is scientific research showing non-touch is detrimental to health, Cross says those negative effects aren't obvious. The effects of a lack of touch are insidious and long-term and don't amount to a dramatic story for prime time.

"Humans deprived of touch are prone to mental illness, violence, compromised immune systems, and poor self-regulation," Cross says. So serious are the effects of touch deprivation, it's considered by researchers to be worse than physical abuse.

## Benefits of Touch

Stated more positively, science does support the preventive health benefits of touch. For example, Tiffany Field, PhD, founder of the Touch Research Institute, notes that in a study on preterm infants, massaging the babies increased their weight and allowed them to be discharged earlier. Discharging babies earlier from expensive neonatal intensive care units could save the healthcare system \$4.7 billion annually.

In other research, scientists at the University of North Carolina found the

stress hormone cortisol was reduced with hugging. Cortisol is associated with anger, anxiety, physical tension, and weakened immunity.

Massage therapy has been found useful in reducing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, pain, and stress, and is helpful for those suffering with a variety of illnesses, including anorexia nervosa, arthritis, cancer, fibromyalgia, and stroke. While more research is needed, massage therapy has also been shown to reduce symptoms associated with alcohol withdrawal and smoking cessation, and can strengthen self-esteem, boost the immune system, increase flexibility, and improve sleep.

As a nation, we are still finding our way in terms of increasing our touch quotient; but those who make their way into a massage therapy room are farther along than most.



**Massage helps boost self-worth and contribute to emotional well-being and connection.**

# Skin Care Through Changing Seasons

## Keep your skin looking and feeling great

With the change in season, many people will begin to notice a difference in the way their skin looks and feels. Many people find that as we move closer to winter, their skin becomes more dried out and flaky. The good news is there are things you can do to keep your skin looking good as the seasons change.

"Winter approaching doesn't mean your skin has to look dull and dry," says Katherine Goldman, celebrity esthetician/waxologist and owner of the Stript Wax Bar. "It also doesn't mean you have to turn to chemicals in an effort to maintain some of your tan throughout the fall and winter. There are much better options available to everyone who wants to take advantage of them."

Here are some tips that can help keep skin looking and feeling great as the seasons change:

- Dull skin can be countered by having regular facials. Facials remove dead and flaky skin and help restore a natural glow. They give skin an overall healthier appearance.

- When winter approaches, it is important to moisturize the skin so it doesn't become dried out. After cleansing, follow with an anti-aging serum and apply a good quality moisturizer.

- Bypass the chemical tans that come in take-home spray bottles and lotions. They usually contain chemicals you should avoid putting on the skin and will most likely not provide the natural tan look most people seek. Tanning booths also have risks, so opt for an organic spray tan instead

- Go to a waxologist for hair removal, so skin irritation and problems can be avoided. Having hair professionally waxed will keep the skin smooth and unblemished.

- Drink plenty of water to maintain youthful cells. If the skin doesn't get enough water, it will look aged and dehydrated.

- Eat foods like strawberries, tomatoes, salmon, edamame, tea, carrots, broccoli, and avocado, which have nutrients that help protect the skin and

keep it looking great.



**Keep your skin looking great all winter long.**

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## Salt Story

### Good for your skin, but limit your intake

*Shelley Burns*

With all we hear these days about reducing salt (sodium) in our diets, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that salt is an essential element for human life.

It's true we need to be cognizant of how much sodium we ingest in our diets. Excess salt can cause high blood pressure, heart disease, and kidney problems. These are serious conditions. A less serious, but still important, result of excess sodium is water retention. Water retention leads to puffy eyes and dry skin--two effects we don't want to encounter as we strive for healthy skin.

We usually get enough salt from our diets naturally, but we start to run into trouble when we reach for processed foods. Fast food and ready-made meals contain excessive amounts of salt. Out of habit, we may then reach for the salt

shaker to further enhance flavor. The more we salt our food, the more salt we want, creating something of an addiction. We would be better off using fresh herbs, spices, and lemon to flavor our foods.

The recommended daily intake of salt is 1,500-2,400 milligrams. Those with high blood pressure may need to reduce salt intake to less than 1,500 milligrams, or use a salt substitute.

Is there anything good to say about salt? Of course. Salt therapy, or halotherapy, has been used since the early 19th century to treat respiratory and dermatological issues. Salt therapy increases circulation to the skin, which elicits healing. As it does its magic, itching will begin to subside and small cracks will vanish from the skin. Salt also

kills bacteria and fungus and, when used externally, has anti-inflammatory properties.

So put away the salt shaker and treat yourself instead to a halotherapy experience--both steps will improve your health.

*Shelley Burns, a doctor of naturopathic medicine, completed studies at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, and has certification in complementary and integrative medicine from Harvard University.*

*"Your mind can only hold a thought at a time so make it a positive & constructive thought."*

-Author Unknown

Winter's face shines bright. We've been fortunate to receive a mild season. Our personal resolutions keep us taking excellent care of ourselves to celebrate our journey throughout the year. Looking forward to winter activities shared with family and friends! Stay warm and cozy. Best Wishes, Julia

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