

Shiang's Massage & Bodywork Connections

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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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*Nothing is so strong as gentleness.
Nothing is so gentle as real strength.*

-Frances de Sales

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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.

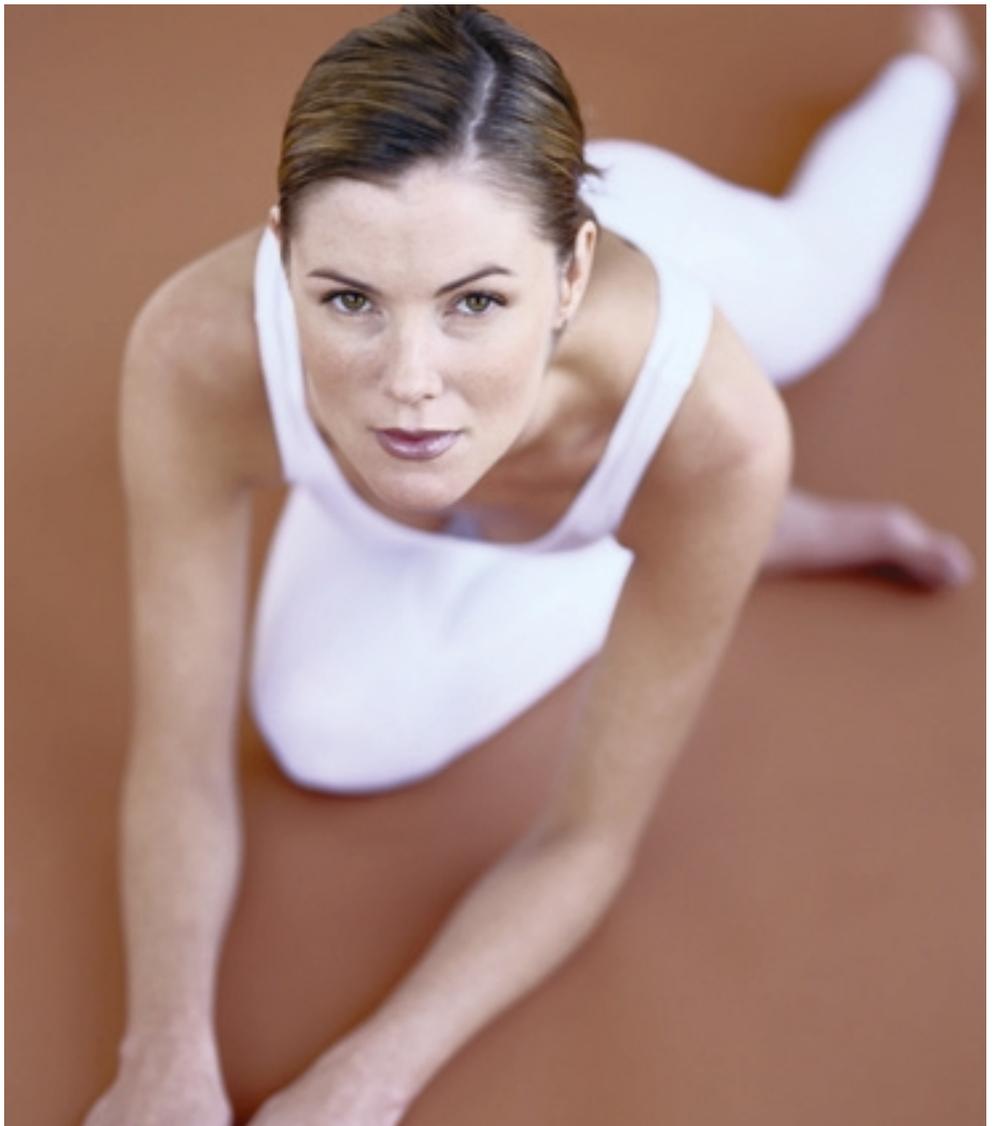
DIET

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.

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.

De-stressing the Commute

Turning Road Rage into Road Sage

The average American commuter spends an hour a day driving to and from work. During this stressful, stop-and-go time, it's likely that blood pressure increases, adrenaline begins pumping, and muscles constrict and tighten. By the time you get home, you're wiped out and grumpy, and you have less to offer to those you come home to. If this sounds familiar, recognize that you have the power to reduce commuter stress. Here are a few tips to make your commuter time contribute to -- rather than detract from -- your life.

- Employ adjustable back cushions, pillows, wedges, and lumbar supports for a more comfortable commute. For more information, check out www.relaxtheback.com.

- To successfully sidestep the late-afternoon slump often caused by the stress hormone cortisol, keep some healthy snacks within arms reach. Celery, string cheese, water, and nuts -- especially almonds -- are good options for the drive home.

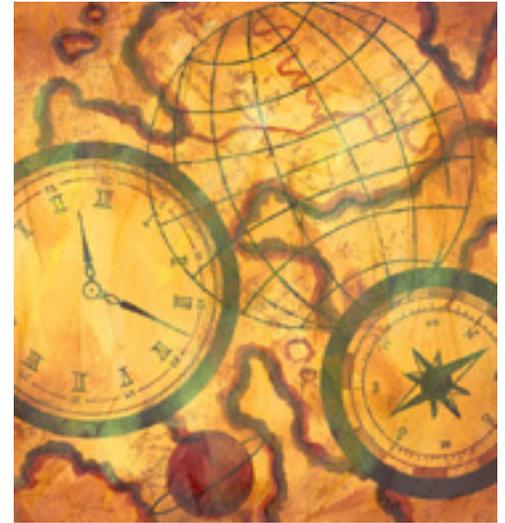
- Borrow books-on-tape/CD from the library. Consider purely entertaining novels to ease the intensity of your drive.

- Learn a foreign language. Libraries also loan out these types of tapes and CD, too.

- Use your commute as an opportunity for spiritual or emotional growth. When stressing about a traffic jam, remind yourself that it's completely out of your control. Remember, attitude is everything.

- Practice breathing. When stress occurs, breathing becomes shallow and constricted. Taking full, deep breaths gives the body more oxygen, helping to regulate physical and mental function. Exhaling fully releases tension and built up toxins.

For more ideas on achieving calm in a busy world, consider reading *Serenity to Go: Calming Techniques for Your Hectic Life* (New Harbinger Publications, 2001) by Mina Hamilton.



Creativity goes a long way on your commute.

The Art of Aromatherapy

Essential Oils Provide Healing and Balance

Aromatic essential oils extracted from herbs, flowers, resin, wood and roots have long been a source of healing since ancient times, aiding in relaxation, circulation and wound healing. However, the use of these medicinal oils declined as the modern pharmaceutical industry developed. In 1928, French chemist Rene Maurice Gattefosse revived the use of essential oils and developed the art and science of utilizing naturally extracted aromatic essences from botanicals to balance and harmonize the health of body, mind and spirit. Gattefosse coined the practice aromatherapy.

Because aromatherapy's affect on emotional health, many massage therapists and bodywork practitioners

incorporate this noninvasive treatment into their practices. Dispensers or diffusers filled with aromatic essences may be used to scent the massage room, and specific essential oils are used on the client's skin during the massage. Because each oil has unique characteristics and benefits, the choice of oil or oils can be customized to the client's needs and emotional state. Whether inhaled or applied topically, aromatherapy requires an understanding of how each essential oil interacts with the body, as well as the mind.

Many pure essential oils need to be diluted, as they can cause irritation when applied directly to the skin. To guarantee safe and correct usage, consult a trained herbalist or practitioner.

The emotions listed below can be gently eased by one or a combination of the following essential oils:

Anxiety: bergamot, cedarwood, clary sage, frankincense, lavender, patchouli, Roman chamomile, rose, sandalwood.

Fatigue, Burnout: basil, ginger, grapefruit, jasmine, lemon, peppermint, rosemary, sandalwood.

Stress: bergamot, frankincense, geranium, lavender, mandarin, neroli, patchouli, Roman chamomile, ylang ylang.

Anger: jasmine, neroli, orange, patchouli, petitgrain, Roman chamomile, rose, vetiver, ylang ylang.

*There came a
time when the
risk to remain
tight in the bud
was more
painful
than the risk it
took to blossom.*

-Anais Nin

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