

Massage as the Body's Workout

Can Bodywork Sometimes Make You Sore?

Shirley Vanderbilt

You've just had a wonderful massage, and you go home feeling both relaxed and rejuvenated. But later that night you feel like you're coming down with something. Or perhaps the next morning, you wake up with twinges of muscle soreness, maybe some fatigue, and you just don't feel yourself. What happened? Chances are it's the massage, and it's perfectly OK.

Keith Grant, head of the Sports and Deep Tissue Massage Department at McKinnon Institute in Oakland, Calif., says, "It's very much like doing a workout. If the muscles aren't used to it, they often respond with some soreness." Grant notes this should last for no more than a day or two. If it lasts longer, the

therapist can find all the kinks that have built up from daily stress and too little or too much exercise. The whole point of a therapeutic massage is to release that tension, work out the kinks, and help your body relax so it can function at an optimal level. All of this work stretches muscles, pushes blood into them, and gets things working again.

A Closer Look

There are several theories, in addition to muscle function, as to why people sometimes experience after-effects from massage.

Massage can stimulate the lymph system, which is comprised of several organs



A good massage can sometimes leave you feeling like you had a good workout.

massage may have been too intense, and the therapist should adjust for this in the next session. However, just as with exercise, when your body adjusts to having this type of workout, your physical response will also be less intense.

A professional massage is more than an ordinary backrub. Your massage

(thymus, tonsils, spleen, adenoids), hundreds of lymph nodes, and a multitude of vessels that run throughout the body. These lymphatic vessels carry a clear fluid, known as lymph, that circulates around the body's tissues, absorbing fluid, waste products, dead cells, bacteria, viruses, fats, and proteins

Continued on page 2

Live, Laugh, Love...

-Anonymous

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In this Issue

Massage as the Body's Workout
De-stressing the Commute
Exercise Myths

Continued from page 1

from the tissue as it goes, while also giving passage to immune cells as they're needed. Massage can sometimes stimulate the lymph system, helping to eliminate toxins from the body. And if the body contains a high level of environmental or dietary toxins, you could feel some mild, flu-like symptoms. While most people come out of a typical massage feeling nothing but relaxed, some people do report feeling a bit nauseous. If this is the case, make sure to drink plenty of water and perhaps take a slow walk. Movement creates a greater lymphatic response and will hurry the process along.

Grant points to another theory being closely examined by experts. Neurological sensitivity, or "sensitization," looks at the "whole response of what's going on in a person." As Grant explains, massage provides a significant amount of input to the central nervous system and the body responds to that increased information. Pain and other occasional after-effects may be the result of a system that has received more information than it can handle at that particular time. And because the amount of sensory input we receive during any day or week is always fluctuating, sometimes we may be overloaded and other times not. It depends on the total stress (emotional, spiritual and physical) being experienced by the body at that moment.

Minimizing Overload

So what can you do to minimize the sometimes uncomfortable side effects? It's important to communicate with your massage therapist regarding your expectations, as well as your current state of health. Your therapist can then tailor the massage to your personal needs and desires, and make adjustments in intensity or technique as the session proceeds. "I'd look at what's being done," says Grant. In some cases, a shorter or more soothing session may be more appropriate. In others, the therapist may need to change the kind of technique used. Much of this can be judged by how the person is feeling and responding during the massage.

In addition to communicating clearly with your practitioner throughout the session, following a few simple steps will help ease tenderness and maximize

benefits:

- UNDERSTAND THAT EVERY BODY REACTS DIFFERENTLY.

Your body is an organism made up of complex systems that react to a constantly changing influx of external factors.

- MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH PRACTICES.

This means keeping your mind free of negative clutter.

- DRINK PLENTY OF WATER IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING YOUR TREATMENT.

Continue to do so for the next day or two. This will rehydrate your tissues and ease the effects.

- TAKE IT EASY AFTER YOUR MASSAGE.

Go home, relax and just allow your body to find its balance naturally.

Getting a massage can do you a world of good. And getting massage frequently can do even more. This is the beauty of bodywork. Taking part in this form of regularly scheduled self-care can play a

huge part in how healthy you'll be and how youthful you'll remain. Budgeting time and money for bodywork at consistent intervals is an investment in your health. And remember: just because massage feels like a pampering treat doesn't mean it is any less therapeutic. Consider massage appointments a necessary piece of your health plan, and work with your practitioner to establish a treatment schedule that best meets your needs.

Like exercise, making bodywork a habitual practice is good for your health. And if you wake up the next morning a little sore, it's probably because you had a really good massage.



Bodywork can stimulate the lymph system, which can help detox the body.

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.

Exercise Myths

Fiction Vs. Fact

Although old fitness fictions like "no pain, no gain" are fading fast, plenty of misconceptions still exist. Following are some of the most common myths, counteracted by the latest research.

FICTION: YOU WILL BURN MORE FAT IF YOU EXERCISE LONGER AT A LOWER INTENSITY.

FACT: The most important focus in exercise and weight control is how many calories are burned during the activity. The faster you walk, step or run, the more calories you use per minute. However, high-intensity exercise may be more difficult to sustain.

FICTION: IF YOU'RE NOT GOING TO WORK OUT HARD AND OFTEN, EXERCISE IS A WASTE OF TIME.

FACT: Any exercise is better than none. For example, regular walking or gardening for as little as an hour a week has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease.

FICTION: IF YOU EXERCISE LONG AND HARD ENOUGH, YOU WILL ALWAYS GET THE RESULTS YOU WANT.

FACT: In reality, genetics plays an important role in how people respond to exercise. Your development of strength, speed, and endurance may be very different from that of other people you know.

FICTION: THE HEALTH AND FITNESS BENEFITS OF MIND-BODY EXERCISE LIKE T'AI CHI AND YOGA ARE QUESTIONABLE.

FACT: The benefits abound! T'ai Chi,

for example, has been shown to help treat low-back pain and fibromyalgia. Improved flexibility, strength, and stress management are just some of the benefits.

FICTION: HOME WORKOUTS ARE FINE, BUT GOING TO A GYM IS THE BEST WAY TO GET FIT.

FACT: Some people find it easier to stick to a home-based fitness program. In spite of all the hype on trendy exercise programs and facilities, the best program for you is the one you will participate in consistently.

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