

The Balanced Body Shoppe News

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Massage Myths, Misconceptions, Truths & Unknowns

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I'm often asked whether or not massage is helpful for or will "cure" specific conditions. Hopefully this article will help you to understand the value of massage for wellness (it's one of the few things in life that feels good and is good for you!) but also dispel some myths that have arisen regarding massage therapy. Please keep in mind that as with any therapeutic modality, the end results will vary with each individual because we are like snowflakes; no two of us are exactly alike!

General truths regarding massage include:

- ★ Increased circulation
- ★ Helps with or alleviates muscle / tendon pain from overuse, underuse or from injuries.
- ★ Can calm or stimulate the nervous system (depending on the type of massage)
- ★ Products used (here at least) are nourishing for your skin and underlying tissues. Remember your skin is the first line of defense of your body!
- ★ Can help with or alleviate certain conditions, including (but not limited to) tendonitis, plantar fasciitis, TMJ discomfort, shin splints, headaches, arthritis
- ★ Can help with recovery from many surgeries, including hip and knee replacements (Massage Cupping is even better for this in many cases)
- ★ Pregnancy (prenatal and post natal) massage is a wonderful gift for mother and child
- ★ Children benefit from massage
- ★ Athletes and "armchair athletes" perform better if massaged regularly
- ★ Is a good tool for helping someone learn to relax and let go of stress
- ★ Helps with stress reduction, headaches and everyday body aches and pains.
- ★ Massage received regularly is a great "preventive"
- ★ Can be helpful for those suffering from depression or anxiety

- ★ Massage can help with digestive issues that are stress related
- ★ Massage can be helpful for back/shoulder/neck pain
- ★ Massage may help with neuropathy
- ★ Massage encourages lymph flow (as does MediCupping Therapy) which supports your immune system and detoxification efforts

You will note that in these general examples I have used the words "can help with or alleviate". I state this for several reasons. How massage works for each individual will vary based on many factors, including their daily activities, their ability to be part of the process (doing homework stretches, hydrating, changing contributing postures or work setups, etc). Another factor is how long the condition has been present and whether or not there was an injury (or surgery). In some cases, massage works as a preventive; in some it helps to "maintain" and in some it can support the body's healing process to complete recovery. In the case of knee or hip replacement, individuals may seek both massage and physical therapy at the same time.

In the case of digestive issues, massage can be an added tool in your toolbox. Simply receiving massage stimulates chemicals in your brain/body that are calming. This allows the gut to relax. Abdominal massage can help with constipation or IBS symptoms by influencing the wave like motion (peristalsis) of the colon if no contraindications exist.

General Misconceptions or Myths include:

- **No pain, no gain.** I have had people who think that the "harder" the massage, the better it is for you. This is NOT true, and, in fact, can make conditions worse. Too much pressure will cause the muscles to involuntarily splint or guard. The pressure that is right for each individual depends on their condition, personal preference and what they are trying to accomplish. Yes, there can be discomfort when working on an injury or scar tissue but in general massage pressure needs to be such that the person on the table does not hold their breath, grit their teeth or tense up (which is counterproductive). A good rule of thumb: If you find yourself tensing against the pressure that is being used, you need to ask the therapist to lighten up on the pressure. On a scale of

1 to 10, with 10 being pain, the pressure should be no more than a 6. You determine what a 6 is and remember that it can change from today's massage to next week's massage!

- **Massage gets rid of cellulite.** While massage can help with circulation and “detoxing “ your body and while massage cupping is great for stimulating your lymph flow, there is no proof that massage alone can rid the body of cellulite. I have a client who assures me that as long as she gets her weekly massage, drinks plenty of water and takes her detox herbs, her cellulite stays away but when she quits any of these things, it comes back. I do not doubt her word, but scientifically, there is no proof that massage alone will rid your body of cellulite (which is a type of fat). I do believe that it is a tool for helping with your overall health however, and as your body becomes healthier (from many sources) cellulite can disappear. Certain essential oils claim to be good for cellulite and can be added to your massage carrier oils. Ask us about this if you are interested in pursuing this path to see how it will affect your body.
- **Massage will cure arthritis.** While massage helps to support your body through increased circulation, which brings oxygen to your cells and helps to “carry out the trash more efficiently”, it is not a cure. Depending on the state of the arthritis, many people will experience pain relief for varying lengths of time due to the above mentioned factors. There are scientific studies that support massage along with taking supplements such as halyuronic acid, MSM, Glucosamine and/or Chondroitin. Since arthritis is a wearing away of the cartilages between two bony surfaces, in order to get maximum relief, one would have to do something to build back that lost or damaged cartilage. Massage will support this process and also will work to balance the musculature around the affected joint.
- **Massage can cure asthma.** No, it will not cure it, but in many cases those who receive regular massage find that they have less attacks or symptoms. Perhaps this is because their stress levels are helped through regular massage and therefore their entire systems are healthier.
- **My massage therapist should be able to tell me what is wrong with me.** Definitely not! I consider myself a skilled massage therapist and my training helps me to “feel” restrictions in muscles and tendons. There are also certain movement tests which show me your range of motion and this helps me decide which muscles can benefit from massage. In the course of my career I have referred many people to other sources for additional help because no massage therapist is trained to diagnose illness. That is why we have you fill out the health form to tell us what your state of health is. This very important document helps us to know which types of massage would be most helpful to you and whether or not there are any contraindications to

massage for you personally; and why we need to know if your health status changes; you start taking any new pharmaceuticals, etc. Examples to clarify this: If you mark on your health form that your doctor prohibits you from physical exercise, it is important for us to know why. If it is because increased circulation would be harmful to you, then full body massage would be contraindicated. If you are taking certain medications which “turn off or dampen” your nervous systems then we need to be aware of this since you will possibly not be able to give us good feedback on pressure, etc. Should you add a new drug, such as cholesterol lowering drugs, it is important for us to know this. Many times I have advised a client to talk to their doctor about cholesterol drugs and their doctors have either taken them off the drug or changed it because they were having muscle pain and/or weakness. These can be side effects of these types of drugs and not only is massage NOT going to help this type of pain, but the person experiencing these new symptoms needs to see their doctor in a hurry or risk damage to internal organs. Only you and your doctor can decide whether or not the risks outweigh the benefits. And it is important for both you and the massage therapist to realize that this may be what may be causing your pain.

- So, please make sure that you fill out your health form completely and update it as necessary, as all of this information helps us to help you. I recently had a new client who filled out his name and address and left the rest of the information blank. When I asked him why he had not completed the health form he replied that he wanted to see how good I was and I should be able to tell HIM what was wrong with him; that he wasn't going to make my job easier! Somehow this gentleman had been misinformed about what a massage therapist's role should be. Yes, we can feel tight muscles and can deduce that you have neck pain or back pain. But sometimes the pain is not from the muscles but from something else so if you tell us you have certain pain and we do not find corresponding soft tissue restrictions, then we may suggest that you need to look elsewhere for further answers. That doesn't mean that massage would not be good for you; it simply means that massage is not a cure for everything!

One thing that I believe is that getting massage therapy regularly is as important as going to the dentist for preventive treatment or going to the gym to work out! It is the best wellness treatment available. They say Bob Hope got a massage every day. Look at all that he accomplished and how active he was, even into his “old age”. It is NOT just pampering; it is preventive wellness therapy!

Call us today to schedule your session and consider a “standing appointment” to celebrate your life and wellness!
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