



# In Touch Newsletter

Empowering a Healthy Lifestyle

## Research demonstrates power of touch

### Touch is vital to development, coping with stress

Studies by the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami Medical School have demonstrated that premature babies who were massaged gained more weight, were more active and alert, and stayed in the hospital fewer days than infants who weren't massaged. The results were the same with babies of cocaine-addicted mothers. In fact, it is now understood that most drug-exposed babies, including those with fetal alcohol syndrome, are capable of leading normal lives if raised in a nurturing environment that includes loving touch. And massage doesn't just help stressed or ill babies. In another study infants who received massage from a parent before bedtime experienced better sleep patterns and less difficulty falling asleep.

### Benefits giver and receiver

The Touch Research Institute grandparent study is particularly remarkable in showing that caring touch is so powerful that it positively benefits both giver and receiver. When volunteer grandparents went into the hospital nursery to massage babies, the babies responded with enjoyment and increased weight gain. The surprising result was that the grandparents' depression and stress hormone levels decreased significantly as well.

### A special kind of touch

Massage therapy is helping people manage the effects of stress, recover from injuries, and cope with illnesses like fibromyalgia, arthritis or cancer. But most importantly, the nurturing touch of massage offers time out to enjoy a pleasurable, nourishing connection with another human being. ❖



Studies show babies who are massaged sleep well and gain weight quickly.

Ashley Montagu, in his groundbreaking book, *Touch: The Human Significance of the Skin*, had this to say, "Tactile stimulation appears to be a fundamentally necessary experience for the healthy behavioral development of the individual. There are significant biochemical differences between humans who have enjoyed adequate tactile stimulation and those who have not."



More health plans are covering massage prescribed by a doctor.

## CNN reports

### Massage gaining favor with consumers and employers

CNN reports massage is a growing trend among people seeking alternative forms of health care.

According to surveys completed by the American Massage Therapy Association, every year more Americans are reporting that they received massage. The increasing interest — and proven benefits — have spurred managed care health plans around the country, including Prudential, Oxford Health Plans, and Kaiser Permanente to add coverage for massage therapy prescribed by a doctor.

A growing number of employers have also taken note of the benefits of massage. The U.S. Department of Justice, Boeing, and dozens of other companies and agencies offer chair massage to their employees. Those companies include hospitals and medical centers which are increasingly making massage available to patients as well. "It's all about the power of touch, which the medical profession is starting to learn has amazing healing properties," said Dr. Brad Stuart, the medical director for California-based Sutter Visiting Nurse Association and Hospice. ❖

## What's the latest scoop?

### Research showing stellar results

Research on massage therapy is proving its benefits! Here is a quick look at just a few of the many completed and on-going studies.

**Pain relief.** People with chronic low-back pain found relief with massage in a study completed in 2000. Massage eased pain, reduced depression and anxiety, and improved sleep and range of motion.

**Decreased anxiety and improved body image.** A report published in a 2001 issue of *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, showed that massage decreased anxiety and poor body image for women with anorexia. The women received 30-minute, twice-weekly massage.

**Reduced depression and increased immune markers.** Women with breast cancer reported less depression and anxiety after receiving massage for five weeks. Natural killer cell numbers, a measure of immunity strength, increased by 12% after massage.



*Massage may not make you a ballet dancer, but research shows it can increase your range of motion.*

**Reduced stress and improved range of motion.** Dance students were assigned to a massage or relaxation therapy group. The massage group received 30-minute twice-weekly massage. The relaxation group performed guided muscle relaxation exercises. Both groups reported less anxiety, improved mood, and less upper body pain, but only the massage group showed a decrease in the stress hormone cortisol and an improvement in range of motion in the neck and shoulders. ❖



*A very common problem we see is tension-type headaches. In years past, I'd write a prescription. Then I started referring the patients with anxiety or tension headaches to the massage therapist. In the two-and-a-half years since I've been referring to her, I've only written two prescriptions for headache — and only one was filled.*

*—James Molloy, MD, Medical Dir.  
Confederated Tribes of  
Grande Ronde, OR*