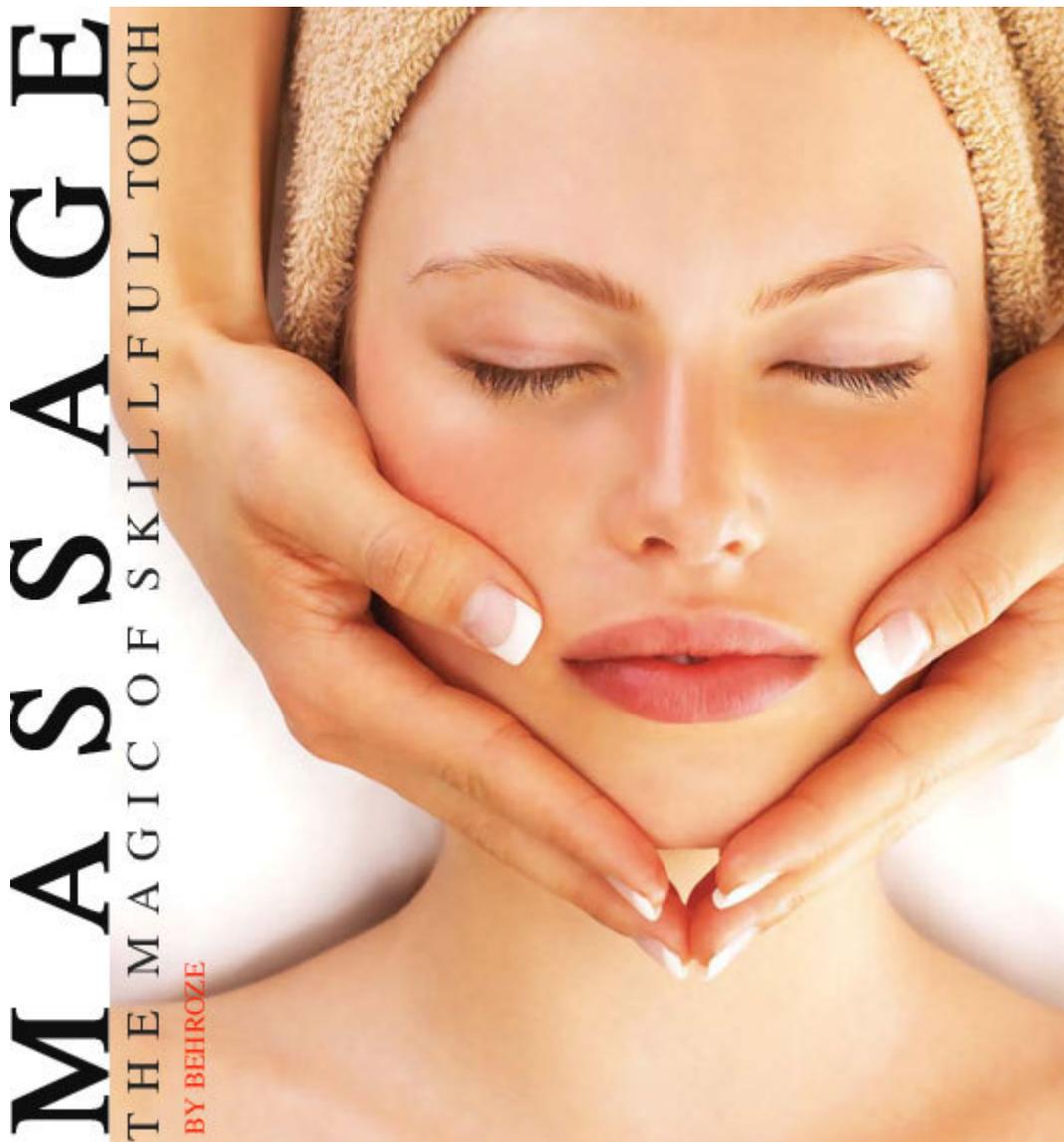


Massage- The Magic of Skillful Touch

What is our first reaction when we hurt or bruise ourselves? Our hands automatically go to soothe that particular part of our body. Even if a child or a loved one is injured or ill, we instinctively reach out and gently caress them to ease the pain.

The sense of touch in human beings is a particularly refined one. Our hands and fingers, especially our fingertips, are extremely sensitive to both pleasure and pain, as they have very fine nerve endings.

Our hands are extensions of the heart and express our deepest thoughts and emotions.



In fact, a skillful touch is an extremely powerful therapeutic tool which connects us at deep emotional levels.

A study carried out in America illustrates this very clearly. Two groups of premature babies were studied; the first was the control group in which the infants were left alone most of the time, except for feeding. The infants in the second group were held and cuddled each time they were

fed. After the study was complete, it was observed that 80% of the infants in the second group had put on more weight than those in the control group. These babies were healthier and were able to leave the hospital much earlier than the control group, saving the government thousands of dollars in childcare.

This and other similar studies show how vital the sense of touch is to human beings; in fact it can be a lifesaver. Throughout history, nearly every culture developed its own traditional hands-on healing methods, which profoundly affected human beings on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. In fact, touch can vary from direct contact with the area to merely stroking the aura without any actual physical contact with the body.

Massage is a wonderful technique which employs skillful touch to relax both body and mind. It is a unique way of communicating without words; a healing art, which relieves pain and suffering.

In today's jet age, massage is most definitely a stress buster as energy levels are low but stress levels are very high – whether it is deadlines at work, commuting in crowded cities or emotional confrontations in relationships. Children particularly, are brought up more with dictatorship than with love and understanding; the stricter the upbringing, the more dysfunctional and stressed-out adults they become.

It is now proven beyond doubt that our thoughts and emotions have a direct imprint on our body. In fact, we are what we think!

Often we notice that when we are happy and positive, our body feels light, flexible and energetic. When we feel depressed, stress, tension and negative emotions take over and we feel weighed down – as if a heavy burden is upon us. It is as if we are literally carrying the 'weight of the world' on our shoulders.

If this tension is not dissipated, it gets stored in the body. Negative thinking and suppression of desires leads to more blocks, preventing the free flow of energy. This blocked-up energy causes rigidity in muscles and tissues. Excess tissue builds up in the affected area forming a 'protective' psychological barrier. Wilhelm Reich, the father of modern psychology coined an apt term for it. He called it 'Body Armour', a term massage therapists are all too familiar with.

Rigidity in the body brings rigidity to the mind, and each perpetuates the other, setting up a vicious cycle.

This brings along chronic fatigue, high blood pressure, chronic shallow breathing, a negative self-image and low self-esteem – the classic pathologies of neuro-muscular stress.

Stress can be stored anywhere in the body. However, it is found that specific areas like the neck, shoulders and back muscles usually accumulate more stress. These muscles tend to remain stiff and tense all the time until eventually the pain becomes chronic. It gets aggravated with bad posture, hunching over the computer for hours together, wearing ill-fitting uncomfortable shoes and lifting heavy things incorrectly.

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Our muscles have an inbuilt memory; they learn to contract on stimulation and relax when the stimulus is removed. However, when we remain stressed for a long time, muscles forget their original relaxed state and remain contracted all the time – a condition called sensory-motor amnesia. This leads to chronic stress and can be very painful.

A good massage therapist locates and gently eases out the tension areas. Different massage strokes like kneading, friction and application of pressure enhance blood circulation and flush out wastes and toxins from the body. The heat generated by friction and rubbing helps to loosen the tight muscles. In expert hands, knots slowly unravel and the muscle gradually comes back to its original elasticity. This takes time, but guided breathing by the therapist and a willingness to consciously let go of holding patterns on the part of the client, are key factors. Once muscles relax, breathing slows down and the positive and negative charges in the body start to balance out.

A massage treatment should ideally feel like one continuous flow, and a good massage can even lead to altered states of consciousness.

Circulatory massage can be relaxing or energizing. The strokes are nearly always in the direction of the heart. Long, smooth strokes called effleurage, and kneading, squeezing strokes called petrissage, are the two most important strokes in circulatory massage, so called because blood and lymph circulation as well as the heart function are greatly facilitated.

A relaxing massage generally starts with the face and head to calm the thoughts, and then moves downwards.

Esalen Massage, developed at Esalen Institute, California, at the very beginning of the New Age movement, is a very soothing massage with long, rhythmic strokes, which can put people to sleep! It is great for business oriented people and those who are tense and hyperactive, as it is a wonderful way of transferring healing energy.

Swedish Massage on the other hand, is brisk and invigorating and generally starts with the legs and feet. Rapid strokes with deep friction and percussion movements break down congested lymph areas, cellulite, and muscle spasms, leaving the person totally rejuvenated. It is excellent

for athletes, obese people and those who are depressed or withdrawn, as it increases vibrancy levels dramatically!

These days Deep Tissue Massage is very popular. This employs firm, constant compression, which liberates psychic tension in the muscles. It elongates and restores the elasticity of muscles as well. This kind of slow, deep work is most effective when both the client and therapist breathe in unison.

Thai Massage is also called Yoga Massage and includes some amazing stretches, postures and unique pressure-point work, all of which have a direct effect on the energy meridians in the body. This enhances chi, the vital life-force energy in the body. The therapist uses his or her own body weight in a fluid, rhythmic manner and gently guides the client into a deeply relaxed harmonious state, where yin and yang – the polar opposites – come together in perfect balance. Ayurveda – the 'science of life' – too recommends massage as a daily practice to stay fit and healthy and to remove toxins from the body. The sequence moves from the legs upwards to the back, torso, the arms and then finally to the head. The strokes are proximal to distal and flow outward to nourish the extremities as well.

Ayurveda especially recommends the correct use of different oils according to the season, pulse diagnosis, age and temperament of the client.

Ayurvedic Massage is said to balance the tridosha – the three humours: vata (wind), pitta (bile) and kapha (phlegm). It is known to rejuvenate the system, nourish the seven dhatus (constituents of the body), remove fatigue, improve eyesight, increase longevity, enhance immunity and strengthen the skin improving its color and texture.

Head massage is given a lot of importance in Ayurveda as it increases the supply of fresh oxygen and glucose to the brain, relaxes the nervous system, improves the circulation of life-giving cerebro-spinal fluid, increases the secretion of hormones and enzymes necessary for growth and development of brain cells, cures dryness, and increases the level of pranic energy in the brain. Nowadays, 'Indian Head Massage' is in great demand in spas and beauty parlours the world over.



Some other benefits of massage include

- * *Feeling relaxed yet alert*
- * *Increased body awareness*
- * *Increased freedom, ease and range of movement*
- * *Enhanced confidence and energy*
- * *Reduced need for sleep, yet sleeping more peacefully*
- * *Faster healing*
- * *Feeling emotionally nurtured*
- * *Feeling good and positive*

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Massage is nearly always done with oils. These days, Aromatherapy Massage with essential oils is very popular. Essential oils like lavender and tea-tree are the only ones that can be used without dilution. Almost all the others, like geranium, rosemary, cypress, citrus and many others are generally blended in tiny amounts with carrier oils like olive, almond, apricot seed and vitamin E. All these have their own characteristic aroma and give a luxurious feel to the massage. These oils have many beneficial properties and are a wonderful complement to a good massage.

They relax, awaken and energize the nervous system, increase immunity, combat insomnia and infections, and have an overall healing effect on the body and mind, particularly on the emotions. Ayurvedic massage also uses sesame, mustard, coconut, olive and castor oil. These oils are all extremely beneficial and can be heat-producing or cooling, depending on which oil is used. Particular herbs and spices mixed or cooked in these oils – according to the season – are recommended for sound health.

Uses and Benefits of Massage Oils

- * *Mahanarayan taila – for muscular pain, rheumatism, arthritis, gout and stiff joints*
- * *Brahmi amla – for head massage*
- * *Bhringaraj – for head and hair. Prevents dandruff and dry hair. Soothes pitta*
- * *Almond oil -for disorders of the brain, nervous system and for premature aging. It soothes the burning sensations of the skin*
- * *Mustard oil – cures pains, swellings and wounds. It is a wormicide. It increases pitta and body heat. Destroys diseases caused by vata and kapha*
- * *Olive oil – helps rheumatism, gout, arthritis, sprains, polio and assists with general muscle, ligament and nerve weakness*

Aromatherapy Oils

- * *Antiseptic – lavender and eucalyptus*
- * *Anti-inflammatory – chamomile and lavender*
- * *Fungicidal – patchouli, tea tree, sweet marjoram*
- * *For burns, cuts and scars – lavender, geranium, neroli*
- * *Deodorant – bergamot, thyme, juniper, cypress, lemongrass*
- * *Insect repellent – spike lavender, clove, camphor, garlic and citronella*

Contra-indications in Massage

Massage, if judiciously used, helps in healing. However, it should be avoided in the following conditions:

- * *Inflammation or skin disease*
- * *Purulent (pus) accumulations*
- * *Swellings that might be malignant*
- * *Recent phlebitis (inflammation of veins)*
- * *Recent osteomyelitis (bone infection)*
- * *Recent lymphangitis (lymph node infection)*
- * *Recent thrombosis (clots in blood vessels)*

- * *Severe degrees of hernia*
- * *Very high or very low blood pressure*
- * *Indigestion, constipation, vomiting, fever, very bad cough or cold – (aggravated kapha)*
- * *Heart problems*
- * *Epilepsy*
- * *Pregnancy*
- * *Just after meals*

Most people find it very difficult to really relax; they are tense all the time – even in their sleep. The deep relaxation that a massage treatment affords paves the way for the body and mind to heal, as beneficial hormones are secreted by the endocrine system, which in turn affect all other systems in a positive manner.

Massage heals and nurtures not only the recipient, but the masseuse as well.

It is a most amazing and fulfilling experience to connect at such a deep and non-sexual level with another human being. For many people, it makes a tremendous impact when they find that they are received fully and non judgmentally – just as they are. Massage can therefore also be an opening for deep emotional release, as long withheld patterns may emerge, which are then gently released. The intention of the therapist plays a vital role here, and a loving, caring attitude makes a world of difference in turning a massage into a memorable experience.

***So treat yourself to some TLC
(tender loving care)...TODAY!!!***

The author is working as a massage therapist in Gurumaa Ashram, Gannaur, Sonapat, Haryana.



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