

# Massage News from Diane at Dan's Touch of Style

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## What Massage Can Do For You

### Beyond Pain Relief, Massage is Valuable for Preventive Care

Karrie Osborn

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Whether it is an aching back, recovery from an injury, a case of carpal tunnel syndrome, or a host of other debilitating physiological conditions, there's no doubt massage and bodywork works to relieve pain. But once your therapist has helped you tackle your pain, do you quit calling? When the pain is gone, are you gone, too?

Massage therapy is highly effective for pain relief, but it is an amazing preventive therapy as well. Massage helps build and maintain a healthy body (and mind), it combats stress, and it works to

Massage can play an important role in a good health-care regimen. Just as you eat healthily, exercise regularly, and take your vitamins to ward off illness and maintain a fit body, you should consider making frequent massage a part of your wellness lifestyle.

According to Benny Vaughn, a sports massage expert in Fort Worth, Texas, one of the benefits of consistent and regular massage therapy is better flexibility. "This happens because regular and structured touch stimulus enhances the nervous system's sensory and spatial processing capacity," he says. "That is, the person becomes more aware of her body's movement in space and becomes more aware of tightness or

*Whoever is happy will make others happy too.*

-Mark Twain



Massage helps you maintain a healthy body.

keep the immune system strong. In short, massage can keep on working for you, even after the pain is gone.

#### MASSAGE FOR WELLNESS

If it's been a while since you booked your last massage--because your pain is no longer an issue or your injury is fully rehabbed--you might want to consider massage for preventive care.

pain long before it reaches a critical point of mechanical dysfunction."

As a preventive measure, frequent massage puts you more in tune with your body. "The consistency of massage therapy over time creates a cumulative stress-reduction effect," Vaughn says.

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#### Office Hours and Contact

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"The person becomes acutely aware of stress within her body long before it can create stress-driven damage."

And the more massage you receive, the more benefits you reap. "Massage therapists know that people who get massage regularly demonstrate greater improvement and notice a reduction in pain and muscular tension, as well as an improvement in posture," says Anne Williams, author of *Massage Mastery: From Student to Professional* (Lippincott Williams Wilkins, 2012).

"People regularly make a commitment to fitness," Williams says. "People regularly make a commitment to changing their diet. The difference they'd experience if they regularly made a commitment to massage is mind-blowing."

### STRESS IS A KILLER

Stress is more than just a word we throw around to describe the nature of our hectic day. Today, we understand that stress kills.

According to the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, 60-90 percent of all US medical visits are for stress-related disorders. Chronic pain, headaches, heart disease, hypertension, and ulcers can all be wrought from stress. Many would argue that the best benefit of massage is its ability to reduce the stress in our lives.

From the perspective of daily living, think about the stress you felt at today's meeting--now it's hiding in your neck. Tomorrow that can turn into stiffness and eventually begin to affect other parts of your body. If you see your massage therapist for your regular session this week, the chances are good you won't reach the tipping point. Think of massage and bodywork as a way to rebalance your body.

Noted researcher Tiffany Field and her colleagues from the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine report that massage causes positive biological changes when it comes to stress. Through the course of more than 20 studies, these scientists found that massage decreases cortisol (a stress-derived hormone that negatively affects immune function and kills our immune cells) and increases dopamine

and serotonin (the neurotransmitters most associated with emotional well-being).

Add to this the research that shows massage can lower your heart rate and decrease your blood pressure, and you have a mighty effective, nonpharmacological, stress-fighting tool that's about as natural as natural can get.

### A ONE-HOUR VACATION AND SO MUCH MORE

You may no longer need to rehab that knee or work the scar tissue from your surgery, but don't forget about everything else massage can do for you. Massage is the entire package, helping to heal body, mind, and spirit. Think of it as a one-hour vacation with amazing return on investment.

Whether it be maintaining joint

flexibility, managing blood pressure, or enhancing immunity, massage works. From repair to relief and from recovery to relaxation, massage is a magnificent piece of natural medicine you should always have as part of your health-care routine.

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Regular massage helps reduce stress and improve your quality of life.

# Keeping Your Back Healthy

## Tips to Avoid Lasting Pain

Chances are good that, at some point in your life, you will have back pain. In fact, 70-85 percent of Americans will experience back pain at some point in their lives. But even with those odds, there are still several ways to minimize your risk and give yourself the best chance to live pain-free.

Several factors can cause back pain, including stress, poor posture, bad ergonomics, lack of exercise, arthritis, osteoporosis, a sedentary lifestyle, overexertion, pregnancy, kidney stones, fibromyalgia, excess weight, and more.

With all of these potential causes lurking, it's important to look at behaviors that can help you prevent and avoid back pain before it starts. Here are a few simple healthy back tips from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke:

- Stretch and warm tissues before exercise or other strenuous activities.
- Practice good posture. Avoid

slouching when sitting or standing.

--When standing, keep your weight balanced on both feet.

--Follow good ergonomics in the workplace. When sitting for long periods of time, rest your feet on a foot support. Make sure your chair and work surfaces are at the proper height. Get up and move around in between long sitting stints.

--Avoid high-heeled shoes.

--Watch your weight. Excess weight, especially around the waist, can put undue stress on lower back muscles.

--Exercise. Core strengthening moves, especially, will also benefit your back.

--Don't lift items that are heavier than you can handle. Remember to lift with your knees, not your back. Pull in your stomach muscles, keep your head down and in line with your straight back, and do not twist when lifting.

--Get a massage. Using therapeutic bodywork can melt pain-inducing stress away from your back and the rest of your body.



Massage is a great way to beat back pain.

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## Try This Breathing Exercise

*Anne Williams*

Do you ever find yourself unconsciously holding your breath when you're tense? This can cause tension to build in your body and may let the chest collapse, leading to misalignment.

Proper breathing provides oxygen to the muscles and body, helps you stay relaxed and centered, and even helps you maintain correct body alignment throughout your day.

You can also use breathwork as part of a stress-reduction program by following this progressive relaxation exercise.

1. Begin by lying in a comfortable position without crossing your arms or legs, and focus on your breathing to create a slow, deep pattern. Inhale through your nose while counting to 10 and expanding your abdomen. Hold the breath for one second, and exhale

through your nose on the count of 10. Inhale and exhale in this pattern five times.

2. Beginning with your head, tense your facial muscles as tightly as possible and count to five. Release the muscles completely, and sense the muscles feeling heavy and still. Work down your entire body, tensing muscle groups and then relaxing them. After the head, move to the neck, chest, arms and hands, abdomen, back, thighs and gluteals, lower legs, and feet.

3. After relaxing each set of muscles, mentally scan your body for any areas of remaining tension and ask those areas to relax completely.

4. Repeat the slow breathing exercise.

5. Gently begin to move your body to come out of the deeply relaxed state.

Try using progressive relaxation directly

before or after your sessions, directly before bed, or at any time during the day as a pick-me-up. Focus on taking full, deep, even, rhythmic breaths. With a little practice, you can become more aware of your own breathing patterns and use breathwork effectively as you move throughout your day.



*Sometimes the  
cure for  
restlessness is  
rest.*

-Colleen Wainwright

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