

Massage Therapy Your Wellness Strategy

Nora Brunner

For many people, massage and bodywork are a critical part of their health and wellness strategy--an idea medical professionals are increasingly embracing. In a recent online survey, massage devotees talked about their commitment to regular massage therapy. These folks find a way to afford it, regardless of other demands on their resources.

Best Life

"Getting massage has been part of my life since I was in my 20s--I'm now in my 50s," says Los Angeles chef Gisele Perez. Once a modern dancer and now proprietor of a boutique catering company, she considers massage

spiritual guru calls "efforting," it's nice to know that letting go of it all can be just as productive, perhaps even more so.

Some have come to massage because of injuries and found unexpected blessings in their situations. While many first-time massage clients have become acquainted with massage because of referrals from health professionals, there's no need to wait for an injury to prompt you into forming the massage habit.

"I consider professional massage therapy an essential part of my best-life design," says author and psychologist Mollie Marti, who suffered a whiplash injury

*What you do
today can
improve all
your
tomorrows.*

-Ralph Marston



Massage is an important part of a wellness strategy.

necessary to the career she loves. She finds massage helps resolve problems she's grappling with and that solutions arise spontaneously in her thoughts while she's on the table. "I think it maintains my emotional balance," she says. Many massage clients report cathartic experiences when they finally allow themselves to fully relax. With so much of our lives devoted to what one

several years ago in a car accident. "It's been worth every penny," she says of the work that has improved her range of motion and relieved muscle soreness, as well as offered deep relaxation, greater alertness and clarity, and a heightened sense of well-being. "I feel better and am happier and more at peace."

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Professional athletes also use massage strategically before events to help them achieve their best. Research also shows muscles recover more quickly after a workout. For weekend warriors, a massage can help recovery, or also serve as a reward for sticking with an exercise program. That's doubling the return on your investment.

Research shows the cost of a massage has remained fairly steady in recent years, even as other popular pastimes have become more expensive. "Affording it" is a matter of priorities, or at least that's the way 22-year-old Elizabeth Sosa Bailey sees it. She calls her modest Houston public radio station salary "practically a sneeze," yet she manages to get a monthly massage. "My first massage was only 30 minutes, but I fell in love," she says. "It's worth it because it makes me happy."

Being happy is only part of it, since studies show an ever-increasing number of health benefits massage affords. This is an instance where the pillars of intelligently managing your health--prevention and early intervention--come into focus.

Medical Odyssey

Attorney J. Kim Wright of Taos, New Mexico, stressed out over the constant demands on her time after founding a law practice 15 years ago. Those pressures, combined with having a large family at home, soon led to margaritas at a local watering hole with her staff every Friday after work. When coworkers started discussing an additional drinking night on Wednesdays, she got worried about the path she was on. A colleague recommended massage. She scheduled weekly massage appointments, a resource that also helped her cope with a divorce when her life changed direction. The sessions stretched her budget, but became her lifeline, she reports, adding that she often broke into tears the minute she walked through the door for her massage session. "It was the outlet I needed," Wright says.

Christine Stump used to work as a full-time paramedic and continues in a part-time capacity after adding yoga teacher to her career. Massage is how she maintains her emotional balance and avoids injuries that have disabled her coworkers in the "adrenaline-soaked

world of emergency services," she says. "I process my experiences with greater ease," Stump says. "My monthly massage is a tremendous reset button."

A Self-Care Experience

Author and teacher Charlie Adler of Washington, D.C., has been getting regular massage for 10 years, admitting that perhaps he enjoys his job a little too much. Adler is a full-time instructor in wine and cooking and can't help but enjoy the fruits of his--and his students'--labor. Committed to holistic medicine, he says: "Massage is disease prevention for me. It seems wrong to me to wait until you get sick to go to a doctor." The 47-year-old reports he often falls asleep in the middle of his session.

"As a ranked expenditure, massage is up very high," he says. "It has a higher importance than going out to eat and

cable TV ... I rank massage equivalent with faith or religion, or maybe as one component of my belief system. I have missed massage for as long as three weeks just once in 10 years," he says.

Former ballet dancer Luis Perez of Miami, Florida, has been getting massage twice that long. With 20 years of twice-weekly massage, he works in health and fitness, putting his money where his mouth is. "I have given myself permission to make myself a priority," Perez says.

Many people make massage a priority, and you may well be one of them. Know that you have chosen something with real value that benefits your health--both in body and mind.



Incorporate massage into your wellness strategy for best results.

Massage Ambiance is Key

Is the Scene Conducive to Your Relaxation?

Nina McIntosh

Ever had a massage but couldn't fully enjoy it because the music was too fast, or the aromatherapy was not to your liking, or outside noise was disruptive? Whatever the issue, feel comfortable knowing that your massage therapist wants you to express your feelings.

The quality of communication between the practitioner and the client is key. By all means, you should speak up about anything that diminishes your enjoyment of, or ability to focus on, your session, no matter whether the problem is the therapist's office or her/his behavior. It's your session, and you have the right to an environment that supports your relaxation.

Having said that, it's not always easy to assert yourself while lying naked on a table. However, your practitioner is a professional and is open to, even seeking, feedback. If you are bothered, others probably are too. Your practitioner wants and needs to know and would much prefer you mentioning

it than choosing to not come back again.

And you may learn something as well. Perhaps that lavender oil you thought was too strong actually helps relaxation and will work wonders for you in a more diluted form. Or maybe the exterior noise is a problem only on Monday evenings, and you can be sure to avoid booking your appointment then.

FIXING THE PROBLEM

The situation may be something easy to remedy, like changing the music or essential oils. But if it's something more complex, like exterior noise from officemates, your practitioner may need time to address the situation.

View the situation as an opportunity to provide important, constructive feedback about the services offered as well a chance to enhance the therapeutic relationship between you and your massage practitioner.

Your massage session is about you. Take

responsibility for communicating your needs, and your session will be all the more healing for it.



Communicating your needs is key.

Easing Holiday Angst

Five Stress Busters for a Joyous Season

You enter the holiday season with the best of intentions -- looking forward to time spent with family and friends, decorating, shopping, baking. But as soon as you pile holiday activities on top of an already busy life, you're likely to find yourself relating more to Ebenezer Scrooge than Martha Stewart.

Consider these five suggestions to keep holiday stress at bay:

1. DETERMINE A SHOPPING BUDGET

For many, gift giving is an important part of the holidays, serving as a way to express love and appreciation for friends and family. But when the credit card bills arrive in January, you may discover you've extended your holiday stress well into the New Year. Plan your budget in advance, determine what you can spend, and stick to the plan.

2. CREATE A TIME BUDGET

Many will make a shopping budget, but what about making a time budget? Before accepting every invitation this year, decide ahead how many parties you can and want to attend while maintaining your sanity. Make choices about your time commitments based on what you'd really like to do this year, rather than what you think you should do or what you've always done. Don't forget to leave time for yourself.

3. SET FOOD-INTAKE BOUNDARIES

You'll likely be tempted to eat in excess, and don't be too hard on yourself if you don't stick to your pre-holiday eating standards. But do decide ahead of time just how much you'll deviate from your eating routine.

4. STICK TO YOUR EXERCISE REGIMEN

Regular exercise is a powerful stress buster. You'll feel better, sleep better, avoid weight gain, boost your immune system, and maintain a positive outlook about yourself. While it may seem like an easy time concession to make, don't give in to the idea. Stick to exercise, and you'll thank yourself for it.

5. TAKE TIME TO REST

Take time from your schedule to honor the cycles of the season. The holidays fall during winter solstice -- the shortest day of the year. Learn from nature, and get plenty of rest.

*Love yourself
enough to set
boundaries.
Your time and
energy are
precious.*

-Anonymous

A GIFT OF HANDS

Fall has come upon us with it's slower pace and lessening daily sunlight. This can be difficult for some whose systems bog down without the extra hours of sunlight in a day. Stay attentive to those "self-care" actions that are a part of your summer and spring days. Get outside, eat healthfully, and drink lots of water. A massage is always a good thing to add to your routine as it will give you that extra something to look forward to each month. A Gift of Hands will be here to assist you in maintaining a healthy self. Remember to suggest massage to others as a way to reduce stressful situations. Call to make an appointment or to order a gift certificate at 970-263-4126.

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