

## THE BENEFITS OF MASSAGE

By Dr. Derek Conte

Most people receiving massage have a great feeling of relaxation, vowing to give themselves this gift regularly but often don't, because life gets in the way or it is too expensive, especially in these times. But massage is, in and of itself, a life-giving art form. It gives us this great feeling because it actually improves our mind/body status and health generally. It does this in several very specific ways. I taught anatomy and physiology for six years to massage students at a large school in Atlanta and thereby became acquainted with these benefits.

The first benefit of massage is that of the human touch, which has been well shown to help premature babies to thrive and help people recover from illness. Don't we all feel better when someone touches us lovingly? People report feelings of increased relaxation and well-being, decreased anxiety and fewer depressed feelings and an overall enhanced mood when they receive the touch of another. There is some suggestion that endorphins (feel-good chemicals) are also increased. Sleep is also improved with massage as well as reduced fatigue and joint stiffness. Less pain is reported and fewer activities are limited by pain. Massage also improves the management of menopause-related symptoms.

Major changes occur physiologically during massage as the mental and emotional status of the patient changes. As we relax, a portion of the nervous system, the

parasympathetic, is strongly engaged and inhibits the sympathetic ("fight or flight") portion. This relaxed state conveys many healthful attributes: slower heart rate, dilation of blood vessels, lower blood pressure, increased digestion and glandular function and enhanced immune function due to decreased stress hormone levels. The vasodilatation at the arteriolar level (very small arteries) allows for greater delivery of oxygen and nutrient-laden blood by the capillaries to the tissues, especially the organs, which are the first areas to be deprived of blood under stress. Long-term stress has been suspected to lay the groundwork for illnesses ranging from the common cold to cancer --- all by compromising immune function.

The mechanical motion provided by the strokes of the therapists hands actually move 'old' blood through the veins through the circulation for re-oxygenization and re-nutrition. The lymphatic vessels, which pick up debris, toxins and infections and run parallel to the veins, are similarly detoxified. Massage is an ideal and inexpensive way to maintain a healthy attitude and a healthy body. Contact your massage therapist today for a holiday massage.

*Dr. Derek Conte is a founding member of Chiropractic Specialists in Smyrna on Concord Rd. and is available to talk to your business or group. For questions, call 404-784-6008.*



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