

Restore & Replenish

Winter 2012

Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

Back Pain and Massage

How Bodywork Can Help

Karrie Osborn

Whether it's a pulled muscle from yoga class or an afternoon basketball game, or a long-term pain caused by injury, most of us will come to know the beast that is called back pain. In fact, when it comes to low-back pain specifically, researchers say that 70-85 percent of the population will experience it at some point in their lives.

Causes of Pain

Experts say the cause of back pain can be the result of several factors. High on the list is stress. When our body is stressed, we literally begin to pull inward: the shoulders roll forward and move up to the ears, the neck disappears, and the back tightens in the new posture. "It's an

ergonomics, lack of exercise, arthritis, osteoporosis, a sedentary lifestyle, overexertion, pregnancy, kidney stones, fibromyalgia, excess weight, and more can contribute to pain.

Geoffrey Bishop, owner of Stay Tuned Therapeutics in Flagstaff, Arizona, says mechanics is the main cause of back pain that he sees in his practice. "It's mechanics, including repetitive use and ignorance about preventative postures, and neglect by employers and employees to provide rest and recovery." The past also plays a part, he says. "Old injuries and traumatic events, left untreated and unresolved, seem to dictate where stress lands in the back as well."

*Our health
always seems
much more
valuable after
we lose it.*



Studies show that massage therapy helps reduce back pain more than some medications.

armoring effect," says Angie Parris-Raney, a Denver-based massage therapist who specializes in deep-tissue massage and sports therapy. "That protective mode, with the muscles in flex, can even result in visceral problems," she says, where the pain also affects internal organs.

In addition to stress, poor posture, bad

Massage Offers Hope

Those who suffer with back pain know there are no easy answers for chasing the pain away. Physical therapy has proven effective for some sufferers, as has chiropractic and acupuncture, but massage therapy is also making a name

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Office Hours and Contact

Darcy Peterson, Massage Therapist
darcy@massagetherapy.com
218-820-1722
Monday-Friday by appointment
Occasional Sat. appointments
www.darcy.massagetherapy.com

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for itself when it comes to providing relief. In fact, research has shown that massage can be a great friend to the back-pain sufferer.

"Massage therapists have long treated low-back pain safely and effectively," says Les Sweeney, president of Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals. "They have done so less expensively and less invasively than is possible with other treatments."

In fact, a study by the Group Health Research Institute in Seattle found that massage was more effective at treating low-back pain than medication. Patients who received massage once a week for 10 weeks were more likely to report that their back pain had improved, and improvements were still present six months after the study. Other research from the University of Miami School of Medicine and the Touch Research Institute showed that massage can decrease stress and long-term pain, improve sleep and range of motion, and help lower the incidence of depression and anxiety that often accompanies back pain.

For Parris-Raney's clients, the length of pain relief provided by massage therapy varies depending on the condition they are experiencing. Getting on a regular massage schedule, however, has really helped her clients manage the back pain, she says. When they go past their normally scheduled appointment, "their bodies know it's time to get a massage again." Whether it's just helping clients get through the day, or reminding the stressed-out office worker to breathe, Parris-Raney says massage can play an important part in back pain relief.

Whitney Lowe, owner of Oregon's Orthopedic Massage Education and Research Institute, says the benefits of massage for back pain depend on the primary cause of the pain. "If it is predominantly muscular pain, then massage has a great deal to offer in reducing pain associated with chronic muscle tightness, spasms, myofascial trigger points, or those types of problems. If it's something caused by a joint alignment problem or compression on a nerve, for example, then the role of massage might be somewhat different, such as helping to address the biomechanical dysfunctions,

but not really being able to get pressure off the nerve itself."

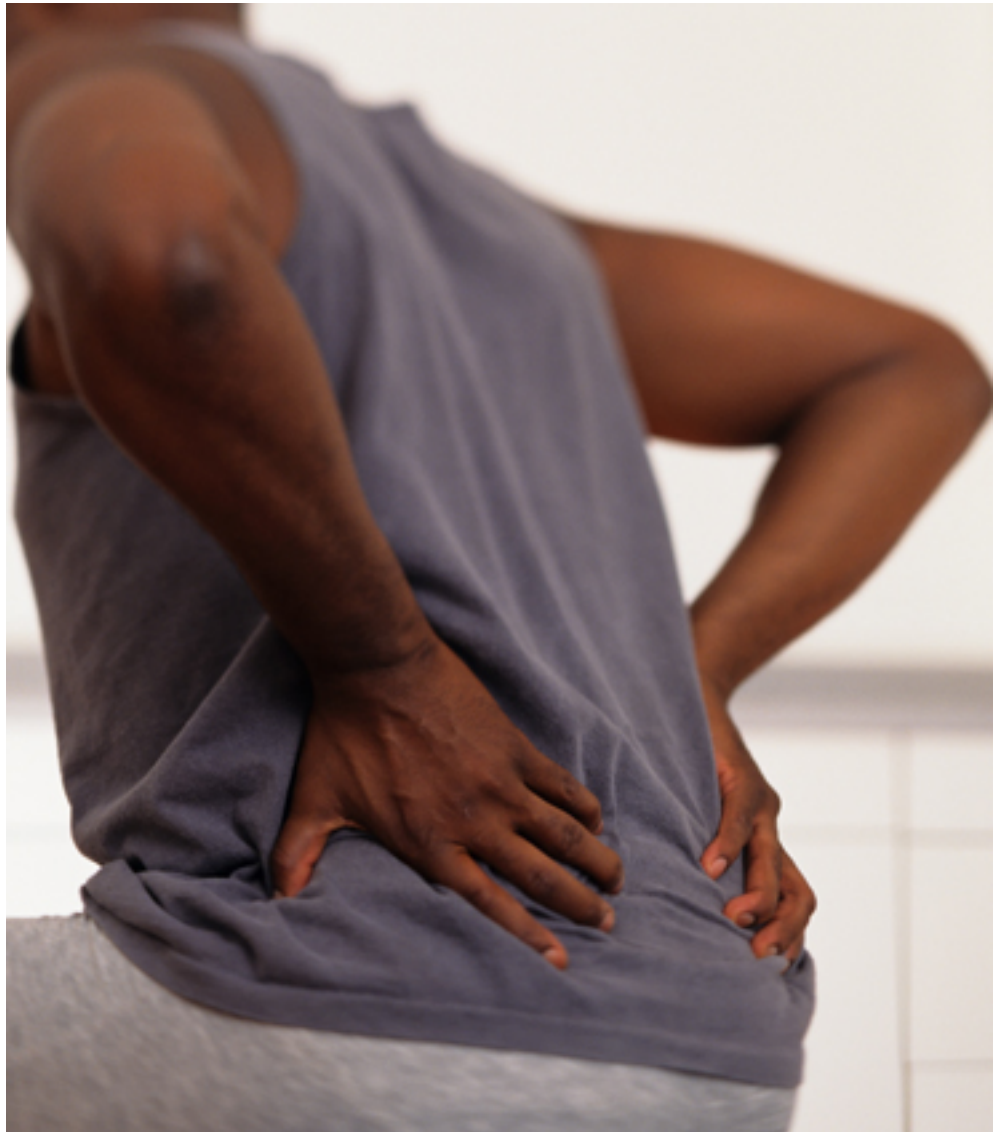
Massage Works

When it comes to back pain, there are a lot of options out there. Ultimately, massage, and its myriad benefits, might be a viable answer. For back pain sufferers, Parris-Raney says massage can work wonders. "Massage can help relax the body, relax the psyche, and improve a client's range of motion and circulation to the affected tissues," she says. Not only can massage help directly with the pain, but it can also make life a little easier, too. "Massage lets you tap into the parasympathetic system," she says, "and tap into all the good hormones that help you sleep better and help you handle stressors along the way." All of that helps in building a healthier back and a happier you.

Benefits of Massage

From stress relief to skin rejuvenation, the benefits of massage are extensive. When it comes to managing back pain, however, there are some specific benefits touch therapy can offer:

- Improved circulation. With increased circulation comes faster recovery time for sore, overworked muscle tissues.
- Increased release of endorphins. The prevalence of these natural painkillers is boosted every time you have a massage. This can only help in managing pain.
- Improved movement. Range of motion and flexibility both get a boost with massage.
- Increased relaxation. When you relax, your muscles relax, thereby calming the pain.



Be sure to communicate with your massage therapist if you are experiencing back pain.

The Wonders of Water

For Skin Health and More

Shelley Burns, N.D.

Creams, nutritional supplements, treatments, lotions, and potions. We are always looking for the next miracle product to keep skin looking healthy and young. However, there is one essential, inexpensive, and often overlooked nutrient right at your fingertips: water.

Just as a car cannot function without oil, our bodies cannot function without water. After oxygen, H₂O is the most important component of the body, responsible for 65-70 percent of its composition. And of this, 80 percent is dedicated to the skin.

Water is the medium for various enzymatic and chemical reactions in the body. It moves nutrients, hormones, antibodies, and oxygen through the blood and lymphatic systems, and it also helps form the matrix of the skin. Devoid of water, the skin becomes dehydrated, resulting in a dry, dull tone.

It's likely that the moment a person feels thirsty, mild dehydration has already set

in. To keep the complexion looking smooth and blemish-free, drink water upon waking and continue drinking it throughout the day at one- to two-hour intervals. At least six 8-oz. glasses of water should be consumed daily and more if you are exercising, perspiring, and/or in hot weather. Ideally, intake should be between ten and twelve 8-oz. glasses of water a day. One note: Don't increase water intake all at once, as the kidneys and digestive system need time to adjust. Add one 8-oz. glass every day or every second day.

What counts toward your daily water intake? Just the basics: water and herbal tea. Caffeinated beverages and alcoholic drinks are diuretics that can contribute to dehydration, requiring even more hydration after drinking.

Not only is water important for skin health, it can also play a key role in the prevention of disease. Drinking eight glasses of water a day can decrease the risk of colon cancer, bladder cancer, and potentially even breast cancer.



Water helps keep the body at optimum health.

Hot or Cold for Injuries?

How to Know Which is Best for You

Art Riggs

We all know that treating an injury immediately after it happens can help minimize the pain and damage as well as facilitate recovery. But after rolling your ankle in a soccer game, or hurting your back when lifting your toddler, or tweaking your knee when stepping out of your car, what's best? Should you ice it to try to control inflammation, or would heat be better to promote circulation?

While it's difficult to establish a fail-safe rule for when to apply ice or heat, the general directive is to use ice for the first forty-eight to seventy-two hours after an acute injury and then switch to heat.

It Depends

The reality is that many conditions are not necessarily the result of a specific

injury. I call these conditions "recurrent acute" and find them by far the most common: sciatica that occurs when you drive a car; a back that flares up every time you garden; or tennis elbow from intense computer work. In these cases, consistent and frequent applications of ice may prove very helpful over long periods of time, particularly immediately after experiencing the event that causes problems.

Conversely, back or other muscle spasms caused by overexertion rather than injury may benefit greatly from heat immediately upon the onset of symptoms or immediately after exercise in order to relax the muscles and increase circulation. Also, muscle belly pain not resulting from acute and

serious trauma generally responds well to heat, which can break the spasms and release the strain. On the other hand, nerve and tendon pain--regardless of the duration of symptoms, even if you've been experiencing them for months--benefit from ice.

What Works for You

The bottom line: different individuals will constitutionally vary greatly in their reactions. Some people are more prone to the types of inflammation exacerbated by heat, while others find their bodies contracting and tightening at the mere mention of ice. Try each option and pay close attention to how your body and mind respond, and let your gut be your guide. Ultimately, what works best for you is, well, what's best for you.

*Our bodies
communicate to
us clearly and
specifically, if we
are willing to
listen. ~Shakti
Gawain*

Here we are off to the fresh start of a New Year. What are your health and wellness goals for 2012? Have you thought about incorporating more consistent massage therapy sessions to improve your health and wellbeing? People who receive regular massage sessions enjoy some of the following benefits: eased anxiety - reduced flow of stress hormones - improved sleep – a boost to the immune system - higher energy levels - reduced fatigue - increased circulation - reduced frequency of headaches Ahhhh, now that would be a wonderful way to start the new year! Wishing you a healthy and happy 2012! Darcy

Darcy Peterson/Massage Therapist



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