

Still Point In-Touch

Summer 2010

Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

Body Image

Learning to Love Who We Are

The statistics are alarming. The majority of U.S. women--some estimate more than 80 percent--are unhappy with their appearance. At least 10 million young women, and 1 million young men have an eating disorder. Girls as young as 6 and 7 are expressing disapproval of their looks, and most fourth-grade girls are already diet veterans. Most unsettling is the fact that more women, and girls, fear becoming fat than they do dying.

Combating the Images

How do you see yourself? Are you content with the person looking back at you from the mirror each morning or do you frown in frustration?



Massage can help restore feelings of self-worth and nurturing--key for body image issues.

Unfortunately, many of us are unhappy with the person looking back. Whether it's lamenting about having a pear-shaped figure instead of an hourglass, or exhibiting more serious, self-hating body dysmorphic disorders, body image is under siege in our celebrity-fixated society. While Madison Avenue continues to airbrush photos of svelte, 120-pound supermodels for

magazine covers, others are trying to teach young girls to love their bodies, beautiful imperfections and all. One way to combat the Hollywood hype and to create an appreciation for the bodies we have is through hands-on massage and bodywork.

Why Massage Affects Body Perception

Being unhappy with our bodies has serious, and sometimes lifelong, ramifications. Feelings of unworthiness and self-loathing can set up a lifetime of self-deprecating behaviors. What regularly scheduled massage allows us to do is "get back" into our bodies and reconnect with ourselves. Massage can

help us release physical and mental patterns of tension, enhancing our ability to experience our bodies (regardless of their shape and size) in a more positive way. Just as it facilitates our ability to relax, massage also encourages an awareness of the body, often allowing us to more clearly see and

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*Forget not that
the earth
delights to feel
your bare feet
and the winds
long to play
with your hair.*

-Kahlil Gibran

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identify destructive behaviors, including overeating or purging.

Massage also creates a sense of nurturing that is especially powerful when it comes to poor body image. Accepting the nonjudgmental touch of a trained therapist goes a long way toward rebuilding an appreciation and respect for your own body. If we find acceptance for who we are and how we look, we are giving ourselves permission to live comfortably in the skin we have.

The Value of Massage

Research shows that touch is a powerful ally in the quest for physical and mental health. Not only does it help us be more in tune with our bodies, it can also help restore a sense of "wholeness" that is often lost in our segmented, overscheduled lives. When we regain that connection, it's much easier to remember that our bodies are something to be cherished, nurtured, and loved, not belittled, betrayed, and forgotten.

Valuable for every age and every body type, massage and bodywork have innumerable benefits. Here are a few:

- Alleviates low-back pain and improves range of motion.
- Decreases medication dependence.
- Eases anxiety and depression.
- Enhances immunity by stimulating lymph flow.
- Exercises and stretches weak, tight, or atrophied muscles.
- Increases joint flexibility.
- Improves circulation by pumping oxygen and nutrients into tissues and vital organs.
- Releases endorphins--the body's natural painkiller.

Every Shape and Size

Whether a client weighs 30 pounds or 300 pounds, massage and bodywork therapists are trained to appreciate all bodies, without judgment, and to deliver the best care possible. As in any session, a therapist's goal is to create an environment that feels safe and nurturing for clients, all while delivering much needed therapeutic touch. For heavier clients, some minor adjustments might be needed in the delivery of the bodywork, but its nurturing, therapeutic, nonjudgmental role will remain unchanged.

Through the Scars

We also have to remember that a negative body image is not necessarily about those few extra pounds on the hips. It might instead be tied to the scars of past injuries and surgeries. Massage can help here, too. For burn victims, research has shown massage can help in the healing process, while for postsurgery breast cancer patients, massage and bodywork can reintegrate a battered body and spirit. In addition to softening scar tissue and speeding postsurgery recovery, massage and bodywork for these clients is about respect, reverence, and learning to look at, and beyond, the scars.

Finding the Stillness

Experts say that when the tissues start to let go and relax under a massage therapist's hands, profound shifts occur emotionally and physically. A softening happens, and the brain and body begin

to integrate again. The chasm between body and mind that created the eating disorder, or fueled the negative body image, begins to narrow. In her book, "Molecules of Emotion," Georgetown University Medical School professor Candace Pert explains that the body is the "actual outward manifestation, in physical space, of the mind." She says that if we generate negative energy in response to our appearance, it can eventually find its way into reality.

Self-acceptance, then, is paramount for living well, and massage/bodywork is a healthy path to get you there. Finding the stillness in a massage session allows you to just "be," without judgment. Partner that with the comfort that comes from allowing your body to be nurtured by someone else, and we begin to remember our value, regardless of our outward appearance, or what we perceive it to be.



Cultivating a positive sense of self, from the inside out, contributes to a life well lived.

Massage and Cancer

A Viable Option?

There's no doubt that cancer patients can benefit from massage therapy. In fact, bodywork can serve as a nurturing healthcare option during the stressful, doctor appointment-ridden time of oncology management.

"Cancer treatment places a heavy toxin load on the body, which massage can help eliminate," says Gayle MacDonald, author of *Medicine Hands: Massage Therapy for People with Cancer*. "However, too much too fast may be more than the client's body can comfortably handle. Skilled touch is beneficial at nearly every stage of the cancer experience, during hospitalization, the pre- or post-operative period, in the out-patient clinic, during chemotherapy and radiation, recovery at home, remission or cure, and in the end stage of life."

The benefits of massage for these clients include improved blood circulation, equalized blood pressure, and help with fatigue and nausea. The place to start is by consulting with your physician and

your massage therapist. For those who are two to three months out from treatment, bodywork that can be used includes lymph drainage therapies, trigger point therapy, neuromuscular therapy, myotherapy and myofascial release, among others. It's better to wait before receiving deeper work.

While hospitalized, some appropriate techniques include cranialsacral therapy, polarity therapy, reiki and Therapeutic Touch. MacDonald says no matter how severe the treatment's side effects, there's always a way to administer some type of bodywork. According to massage therapist and former oncology nurse Cheryl Chapman, while it's important to receive touch from a qualified practitioner who has worked with cancer patients before, "Touch is always appropriate--there isn't anyone who is untouchable."

If you or someone you love is battling cancer, consider massage as a therapeutic, nurturing choice to help navigate this difficult journey.



Bodywork offers nurturing relaxation.

Here Comes the Sun

Updated UV Index Shines Light on Rays

A crucial warning system has been recently updated for your skin's protection. In compliance with the World Health Organization, the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Weather Service revamped the UV Index, a system created to alert people about the level of harmful ultraviolet (UV) light rays from the sun. Overexposure to UV rays can cause wrinkles and premature aging, skin cancer, cataracts, and immune system suppression.

Many factors influence the strength of UV rays: UV light is stronger in the summer, at higher altitudes, and in areas closer to the equator. It's also stronger at midday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the sun is directly overhead.

The new UV index ranges from 0-II with guidelines as follows:

0-2: **LOW.**

Minimal exposure for the average person, but watch for reflected UV from snow and water.

3-5: **MODERATE.**

Stay in the shade during midday. Cover-up outside.

6-7: **HIGH.**

Wear a hat, sunglasses, and a sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 15. Avoid midday sun.

8-10: **VERY HIGH.**

Take extra precautions, and avoid midday sun. Wear protective clothing.

11: **EXTREME.**

Take all precautions, seek shade, and avoid midday sun. If possible, stay indoors.

As part of its daily forecast, the National Weather Service publishes the UV index for each area of the country. Go to www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html and enter your zip code to find your UV index for the day. The Weather Channel, as well as most local TV stations, include the UV index in their weather forecast. It can also be found at www.weather.com.

For a detailed description of the UV index, or for more information on sun protection, visit www.epa.gov/sunwise.

*Whatever words
we utter should
be chosen with
care, for people
will hear them
and be
influenced by
them, for good
or ill.*

-Buddha

Relax into your natural right for well-being!

Mention this newsletter and receive \$10 off your session!

(Offer ends July 1,2010, not to be combined with other offers)

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