

Massage as the Body's Workout

Can Bodywork Sometimes Make You Sore?

Shirley Vanderbilt

You've just had a wonderful massage, and you go home feeling both relaxed and rejuvenated. But later that night you feel like you're coming down with something. Or perhaps the next morning, you wake up with twinges of muscle soreness, maybe some fatigue, and you just don't feel yourself. What happened? Chances are it's the massage, and it's perfectly OK.

Keith Grant, head of the Sports and Deep Tissue Massage Department at McKinnon Institute in Oakland, Calif., says, "It's very much like doing a workout. If the muscles aren't used to it, they often respond with some soreness." Grant notes this should last for no more than a day or two. If it lasts longer, the

therapist can find all the kinks that have built up from daily stress and too little or too much exercise. The whole point of a therapeutic massage is to release that tension, work out the kinks, and help your body relax so it can function at an optimal level. All of this work stretches muscles, pushes blood into them, and gets things working again.

A Closer Look

There are several theories, in addition to muscle function, as to why people sometimes experience after-effects from massage.

Massage can stimulate the lymph system, which is comprised of several organs



A good massage can sometimes leave you feeling like you had a good workout.

massage may have been too intense, and the therapist should adjust for this in the next session. However, just as with exercise, when your body adjusts to having this type of workout, your physical response will also be less intense.

A professional massage is more than an ordinary backrub. Your massage

(thymus, tonsils, spleen, adenoids), hundreds of lymph nodes, and a multitude of vessels that run throughout the body. These lymphatic vessels carry a clear fluid, known as lymph, that circulates around the body's tissues, absorbing fluid, waste products, dead cells, bacteria, viruses, fats, and proteins

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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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from the tissue as it goes, while also giving passage to immune cells as they're needed. Massage can sometimes stimulate the lymph system, helping to eliminate toxins from the body. And if the body contains a high level of environmental or dietary toxins, you could feel some mild, flu-like symptoms. While most people come out of a typical massage feeling nothing but relaxed, some people do report feeling a bit nauseous. If this is the case, make sure to drink plenty of water and perhaps take a slow walk. Movement creates a greater lymphatic response and will hurry the process along.

Grant points to another theory being closely examined by experts. Neurological sensitivity, or "sensitization," looks at the "whole response of what's going on in a person." As Grant explains, massage provides a significant amount of input to the central nervous system and the body responds to that increased information. Pain and other occasional after-effects may be the result of a system that has received more information than it can handle at that particular time. And because the amount of sensory input we receive during any day or week is always fluctuating, sometimes we may be overloaded and other times not. It depends on the total stress (emotional, spiritual and physical) being experienced by the body at that moment.

Minimizing Overload

So what can you do to minimize the sometimes uncomfortable side effects? It's important to communicate with your massage therapist regarding your expectations, as well as your current state of health. Your therapist can then tailor the massage to your personal needs and desires, and make adjustments in intensity or technique as the session proceeds. "I'd look at what's being done," says Grant. In some cases, a shorter or more soothing session may be more appropriate. In others, the therapist may need to change the kind of technique used. Much of this can be judged by how the person is feeling and responding during the massage.

In addition to communicating clearly with your practitioner throughout the session, following a few simple steps will help ease tenderness and maximize

benefits:

- UNDERSTAND THAT EVERY BODY REACTS DIFFERENTLY.

Your body is an organism made up of complex systems that react to a constantly changing influx of external factors.

- MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH PRACTICES.

This means keeping your mind free of negative clutter.

- DRINK PLENTY OF WATER IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING YOUR TREATMENT.

Continue to do so for the next day or two. This will rehydrate your tissues and ease the effects.

- TAKE IT EASY AFTER YOUR MASSAGE.

Go home, relax and just allow your body to find its balance naturally.

Getting a massage can do you a world of good. And getting massage frequently can do even more. This is the beauty of bodywork. Taking part in this form of regularly scheduled self-care can play a

huge part in how healthy you'll be and how youthful you'll remain. Budgeting time and money for bodywork at consistent intervals is an investment in your health. And remember: just because massage feels like a pampering treat doesn't mean it is any less therapeutic. Consider massage appointments a necessary piece of your health plan, and work with your practitioner to establish a treatment schedule that best meets your needs.

Like exercise, making bodywork a habitual practice is good for your health. And if you wake up the next morning a little sore, it's probably because you had a really good massage.



Bodywork can stimulate the lymph system, which can help detox the body.

Steer Clear of the Gym

Take it Easy After Your Massage

Ray Bishop

When booking a massage, consider your schedule, and try to avoid any strenuous physical exertion for at least 24 hours following your bodywork session. Exercising after a session can both increase muscle soreness and compromise the value of the soft-tissue work you've just received. "Strenuous exercise" includes activities such as running, weight lifting, high intensity aerobics, or power yoga classes.

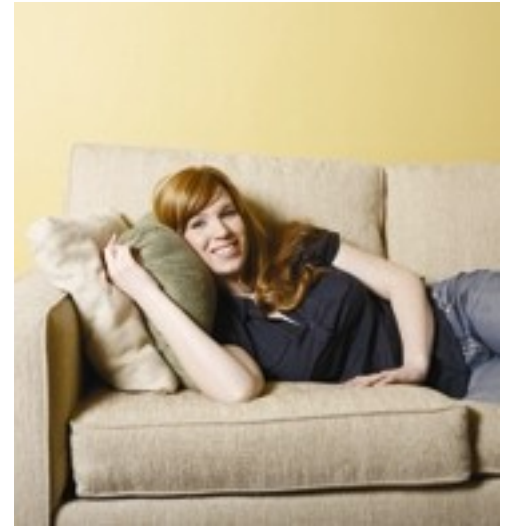
Light exercise such as moderate walking, gentle stretching, or swimming laps at an easy pace is okay for healthy individuals. One widely accepted view in favor of this twenty-four-hour recovery period is that sustained pressure on connective tissue makes it more gel-like. The technical term for this change is thixotropic effect. This state of increased softness lasts about twenty-four hours, so high-intensity exercise may pull or move the tissue back to old patterns or even induce new strain patterns.

Experts usually suggest taking it easy that

evening and the following day. To further reduce any bodywork-related soreness, drink at least two liters of water in the next twenty-four hours to hydrate and flush your system. Take a hot Epsom salt bath and drink gently calming teas such as chamomile or passionflower to facilitate sleep and reduce stress that is so commonly seen as a contributing factor in chronic muscle tension and soreness. If you're dealing with an injury, the guidelines should be adjusted, but these basic suggestions seem to work well for most people.

It does appear that healthy people who exercise vigorously five to six days a week sometimes find even these modest recommendations quite challenging. If you're one of these people, consider working out before your session and then take it easy afterward.

To get the most out of your massage, hold off on the workout. When you do hit the gym again, you'll likely discover your body is more fit than ever, thanks to the healing power of bodywork.



Take it easy and let your massage soak in.

Massage for Old Injuries

Ancient Injuries Don't Have to Make You Feel Old

Art Riggs

Injuries such as chronic back pain, trick knees, and sticky shoulders are not necessarily something you just have to live with. Massage techniques might hold the key to unlocking this old pain.

Will Massage Help?

The benefits of massage will depend on the extent of the injury, how long ago it occurred, and on the skill of the therapist. Chronic and old injuries often require deeper and more precise treatments with less emphasis on general relaxation and working on the whole body. Massage works best for soft tissue injuries to muscles and tendons and is most effective in releasing adhesions and lengthening muscles that have shortened due to compensatory reactions to the injury. Tight and fibrous muscles not

only hurt at the muscle or its tendon, but can also interfere with proper joint movement and cause pain far away from the original injury.

Therapists who perform such work often have specialized names for their work--such as orthopedic massage, neuromuscular therapy, myofascial release, medical massage, etc.--but many massage therapists utilize an eclectic approach combining the best of the specialties.

It Works!

A recent Consumer Reports article ran the results of a survey of thousands of its readers and reported that massage was equal to chiropractic care in many areas, including back and neck pain. Massage

also ranked significantly higher than some other forms of treatment, such as physical therapy or drugs.

If that nagging injury persists, consider booking a massage. Be sure to discuss the injury with your practitioner: How did you receive the injury? Have you reinjured it? And what exactly are your symptoms? Often, the body compensates in one area to protect another that has been traumatized, and this can create new problems.

Discuss the issues with your massage therapist. (Sometimes just talking about old injuries can play a significant role in the healing process.) Together, the two of you can work to determine a treatment plan.

He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.

-Albert Einstein

The intention of Brand New Day Massage Therapy is to positively influence people, body, mind and spirit, by facilitating them to the next level of wellbeing through therapeutic massage and bodywork one session at a time.

Brand New Day Massage Therapy

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