

THE ART OF HEALING: Massage Therapy

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<http://spas.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.qwl.com/mtwc/articles/mtart.html>

Do you ever wish there were a magical oil to squeeze into your aching joints? Some sort of magic gas to pump you up? Is it difficult for you to fall asleep when you want to? When you need to? Do you find yourself in a state of "suspended animation" just when you need to concentrate and finish a painting, a sculpture, or even finish the inevitable bookkeeping nuisance that surrounds your work? Do your muscles and tendons go sore on you? Do you show signs of less flexibility? Less endurance? Do you feel over-extended? Are you getting anxious more often? More depressed?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, your solution may lie in a different kind of art--massage therapy (MT, for short)--the healing art which creates balance and restores that necessary sense of well-being.

Anybody who has ever given or received a friendly backrub already knows something about MT. From the animal world to the human species, all living beings have an inborn bio-emotional need to maintain balance. Balance is the secret of good health. And that ever-present need for the maintenance or restoration of balance responds, almost without exception, to MT in a positive way.

Much in the way that any artistic performance, visual and otherwise, can be astonishing, average, or (sadly) mediocre, MT too can result in an experience of varying magnitude, depth, and overall sense of well-being. And the deprivation of touch--not unlike the stifling of art--is almost certain to be detrimental to society at large. How ironic that so many of us feel more comfortable or secure touching a pet than touching another human being. Or being touched. The perfect opportunity for all people to maintain their health, to reduce stress, overload, and to prevent disease without the side-effects of over-used medication (or drugs), without the traumas (or high cost) of surgery and with a great margin of safety at a reasonable cost is massage therapy.

With the dubious help of the conventional media, most Americans--even artists who should know better--have for the longest time considered MT a luxury, or a whim, or something you always thought about but never quite got around to. But all that, fortunately, is changing. According to the a study by the Harvard Medical School MT is one of the three most often used alternative healing arts. And it is more and more recognized as anything but a frivolous luxury. Especially now, when according to the American Medical Association, more than half of all visits to physicians are for stress-related complaints, it is easy to relate to the way in which renowned pharmacologist and professor, Dr Candace Pert, puts it when she says, "I think we could replace 90% of mainstream medicine with a weekly massage . . . Examining lifestyles with an eye to prevention is a key focus for good health."

Cathartic as art may be, the lives of most artists are not without stress overload. And their need to regain and maintain balance is as necessary for their body-mind health as for their continued creative growth. In an age of technological opportunity and constant change, MT is fast becoming the brush with which a „healing artist¾ can paint and re-paint your well-being. Massage therapy is a holistic, drug-free healing art, which recognizes and incorporates the scientific approach to healing of the West with the artistic, intuitive, energy-based approach of the East. Essentially MT is the manipulation of soft-tissue for the purpose of restoring or maintaining balance within and among the various systems of the body-mind complex while the body is at rest and the mind is letting go.

Naturally, a healing art as old and as cross-cultural as massage has bred many techniques and approaches, so many that some massage therapists--experienced and well trained in many techniques--may not know them all. Often the same technique is practiced quite differently by different massage therapists. And sometimes--for marketing reasons--the same technique has different names! With few exceptions, therefore, as in art, for the person on the receiving end, technique per se is an unimportant issue. It is the attention to the client¼s condition, response and the result that counts.

Sherry Miller, an accomplished painter of tropical third world subjects and New Media expert, describes the following: "Working as a creative artist is a way of transforming input into meaningful behavior or meaningful visions, and the massage therapy process complements the creative act. Experiences enter our bodies and, unless we have the healthy processes in place to transform these events and sensory impressions into meaningful and positive parts of life, the experiences get stored in our flesh--in our cells. Eventually the effort of 'carrying' these cellular loads wears us down and we become ill. Massage therapy works directly on those cells to stimulate them and their membranes, making an opportunity for the stored memories to be released into the ether. [Via massage therapy] we often experience the release as pain. The 'pain' works its way up from our inner organs to our outer organs and extremities such as skin, arms and legs, and then escapes (*italics mine*)."

Performing artist and choreographer, Hallie Wanamaker, simply reports this: "Massage therapy has enabled me to move more freely and to dissipate the unaesthetic, uncomfortable tension I had developed around my neck and shoulders."

It is in the athletic world that MT has made its biggest comeback. An official element of any complete healthcare team, massage therapists today participate in big and small sports events, including the NYC Marathon, the Olympic Games, and the Davis Cup. In 1996, practically no serious athlete trains without regular MT sessions. But in 1984, when Olympic Skater Judy Blumberg was training for the Sarajevo Games, she observed: "A new dimension has been added to my training ever since I started a program of regular massage therapy. European ice-dancers use massage all the time. And for good reason."

Unlike performing artists, visual artists typically do not pay much attention to prevention and conditioning and do not see themselves as athletes. But from the standpoint of a professional massage therapist, visual artists too are athletes in the sense that, dedicated

to the perfection of their work and the honing of their craft, their daily routine consists of countless repetitive, often straining motions which can lead to health conditions and injuries similar to those of athletes! Many visual artists suffer from back and neck pain, knee, shoulder, and wrist problems. Even tennis elbows! And like Sherry Miller, they usually respond extremely well to MT, which offers pain and stress relief without side effects. Sculptors, a growing class of visual artists who use MT, often appreciate the similarity between such body-mind health work and their own sculpting work, and computer artists, the biggest fans of massage arts, are always amazed at how such low-tech discipline has become the perfect remedy to their high-tech, fast-track artistic lifestyle.

Many massage therapists themselves have a strong artistic background with a liberal arts education. But with MT becoming more and more popular, a strong commercial interest (what else is new?) has been developing in which massage therapists are being forced away from the art of massage therapy into an „assembly-line mode of work in store fronts, locker-rooms and beauty salons, where MT is used to sell other products and services. When you're ready for your first MT experience, your money will be better spent in the office of a qualified massage therapist, someone who has been trained in and continues to be dedicated to the art of MT, focusing on you, not on the tip, not on the next body tossed onto their massage table, nor to some beauty or health product they¼are trying to sell. Depending on experience, geographical location, and reputation, a typical professional-quality session is between \$50.00 - \$200.00 (including the house visit). And many massage therapists offer a sliding scale to accommodate the less prosperous among us. When you call a massage therapist for your first appointment, you can briefly describe your situation, ask some questions, and get a feel about the level of professionalism. Before the first session, you will have a brief intake interview, which allows your massage therapist to begin to relate to you and develop the meaningful caring which is essential to focusing on your body-mind needs and performing this healing art in a client-centered manner. After all, artistic and intuitive as massage therapy may be, the scientific and professional goal of the session must always be there for your getting your money¼s worth and for your greater well-being. Ideally, an over-all atmosphere of trust, comfort, attention, patience, acceptance, flexibility, disclosure, and cooperation must prevail for the therapy to be most effective. When it does, both client and massage therapist are highly rewarded. And these rewards get only better with time.