

Welcome

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Massage Therapy Your Wellness Strategy

Nora Brunner

For many people, massage and bodywork are a critical part of their health and wellness strategy--an idea medical professionals are increasingly embracing. In a recent online survey, massage devotees talked about their commitment to regular massage therapy. These folks find a way to afford it, regardless of other demands on their resources.

Best Life

"Getting massage has been part of my life since I was in my 20s--I'm now in my 50s," says Los Angeles chef Gisele Perez. Once a modern dancer and now proprietor of a boutique catering company, she considers massage

spiritual guru calls "efforting," it's nice to know that letting go of it all can be just as productive, perhaps even more so.

Some have come to massage because of injuries and found unexpected blessings in their situations. While many first-time massage clients have become acquainted with massage because of referrals from health professionals, there's no need to wait for an injury to prompt you into forming the massage habit.

"I consider professional massage therapy an essential part of my best-life design," says author and psychologist Mollie Marti, who suffered a whiplash injury



Massage is an important part of a wellness strategy.

necessary to the career she loves. She finds massage helps resolve problems she's grappling with and that solutions arise spontaneously in her thoughts while she's on the table. "I think it maintains my emotional balance," she says. Many massage clients report cathartic experiences when they finally allow themselves to fully relax. With so much of our lives devoted to what one

several years ago in a car accident. "It's been worth every penny," she says of the work that has improved her range of motion and relieved muscle soreness, as well as offered deep relaxation, greater alertness and clarity, and a heightened sense of well-being. "I feel better and am happier and more at peace."

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Office Hours and Contact

Raina Beach, C.M.T. #47233
Stone, Massage & Energy Specialist

- -
By appointment... schedule at:
www.RainaBeach.MassageTherapy.com
401 Marina Blvd. suite "c" SSF CA 94080

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Professional athletes also use massage strategically before events to help them achieve their best. Research also shows muscles recover more quickly after a workout. For weekend warriors, a massage can help recovery, or also serve as a reward for sticking with an exercise program. That's doubling the return on your investment.

Research shows the cost of a massage has remained fairly steady in recent years, even as other popular pastimes have become more expensive. "Affording it" is a matter of priorities, or at least that's the way 22-year-old Elizabeth Sosa Bailey sees it. She calls her modest Houston public radio station salary "practically a sneeze," yet she manages to get a monthly massage. "My first massage was only 30 minutes, but I fell in love," she says. "It's worth it because it makes me happy."

Being happy is only part of it, since studies show an ever-increasing number of health benefits massage affords. This is an instance where the pillars of intelligently managing your health--prevention and early intervention--come into focus.

Medical Odyssey

Attorney J. Kim Wright of Taos, New Mexico, stressed out over the constant demands on her time after founding a law practice 15 years ago. Those pressures, combined with having a large family at home, soon led to margaritas at a local watering hole with her staff every Friday after work. When coworkers started discussing an additional drinking night on Wednesdays, she got worried about the path she was on. A colleague recommended massage. She scheduled weekly massage appointments, a resource that also helped her cope with a divorce when her life changed direction. The sessions stretched her budget, but became her lifeline, she reports, adding that she often broke into tears the minute she walked through the door for her massage session. "It was the outlet I needed," Wright says.

Christine Stump used to work as a full-time paramedic and continues in a part-time capacity after adding yoga teacher to her career. Massage is how she maintains her emotional balance and avoids injuries that have disabled her coworkers in the "adrenaline-soaked

world of emergency services," she says. "I process my experiences with greater ease," Stump says. "My monthly massage is a tremendous reset button."

A Self-Care Experience

Author and teacher Charlie Adler of Washington, D.C., has been getting regular massage for 10 years, admitting that perhaps he enjoys his job a little too much. Adler is a full-time instructor in wine and cooking and can't help but enjoy the fruits of his--and his students'--labor. Committed to holistic medicine, he says: "Massage is disease prevention for me. It seems wrong to me to wait until you get sick to go to a doctor." The 47-year-old reports he often falls asleep in the middle of his session.

"As a ranked expenditure, massage is up very high," he says. "It has a higher importance than going out to eat and

cable TV ... I rank massage equivalent with faith or religion, or maybe as one component of my belief system. I have missed massage for as long as three weeks just once in 10 years," he says.

Former ballet dancer Luis Perez of Miami, Florida, has been getting massage twice that long. With 20 years of twice-weekly massage, he works in health and fitness, putting his money where his mouth is. "I have given myself permission to make myself a priority," Perez says.

Many people make massage a priority, and you may well be one of them. Know that you have chosen something with real value that benefits your health--both in body and mind.



Incorporate massage into your wellness strategy for best results.

What is Hot Stone Massage?

Jed Heneberry

Stone massage is a luxurious experience in which the massage therapist uses warmed, smooth stones to provide bodywork, warming muscle tissue to reduce muscle tension and stiffness, and eliciting physical healing, mental relaxation, and a spiritual connection to earth energy

Photos frequently incorrectly portray the treatment with massage clients relaxing on a towel with stones placed artfully along their naked spines.

In reality, two insulating layers, a sheet and a thick bath towel, will be placed on your skin, and the stones will be placed upon it. Your massage therapist will be using stones heated to 130-140 degrees Fahrenheit. Stones should never rest directly on your skin; they will only touch your skin if the therapist is holding them to apply strokes.

Should I Get One?

The heat of stone massage can be

especially beneficial for certain populations and something to avoid for others. Specific chronic muscular conditions like frozen shoulder or low-back pain benefit as the heat helps tissues relax during massage work. And, while stone massage is lauded for the relaxation it promotes, therapists can use it for targeted trigger-point work and myofascial release as well.

Those who should avoid hot stone massage include people with diabetes, neuropathy, rheumatoid arthritis, skin conditions covering large areas of the body, or local skin conditions such as sunburn, broken skin, localized swelling, or other soft-tissue injuries.

Following are some of the benefits associated with stone therapies:

- oReduces anxiety, pain, and stress.
- oPromotes mental and physical relaxation.
- oCreates a feeling of groundedness and balance.
- oEnhances connection to earth energy.

oPromotes local circulation in the area where it is applied.

oWarms soft-tissue structures so they are ready for firm work more quickly.



Heated stones can provide a wealth of benefits

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.

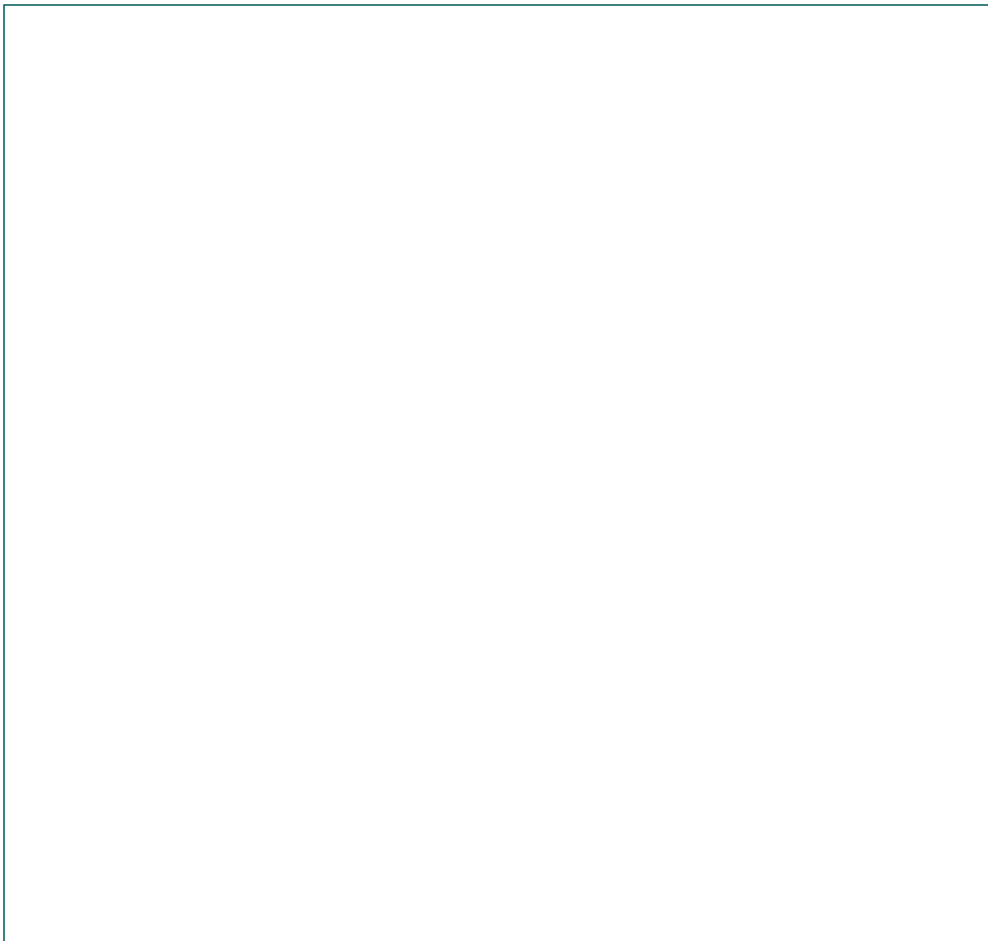
Therapists who perform such work often have specialized names for their work--such as orthopedic massage, neuromuscular therapy, myofascial release, medical massage, etc.--but many massage therapists utilize an eclectic approach combining the best of the specialties.

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.



Massage & Energy Medicine

401 Marina Blvd. suite
South San Francisco, CA 94080-1942



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