

Winter 2011 - Appointments Available On-line

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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."

*Tension is who
you think you
should be.
Relaxation is
who you are.*
-Chinese proverb



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

BLISS THERAPEUTIC MASSAGE

Eva Templeton

Main:(704) 371-3288 Cell:(704) 578-7899

Monday through Friday 9am-7pm

www.BlissofCharlotte.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."

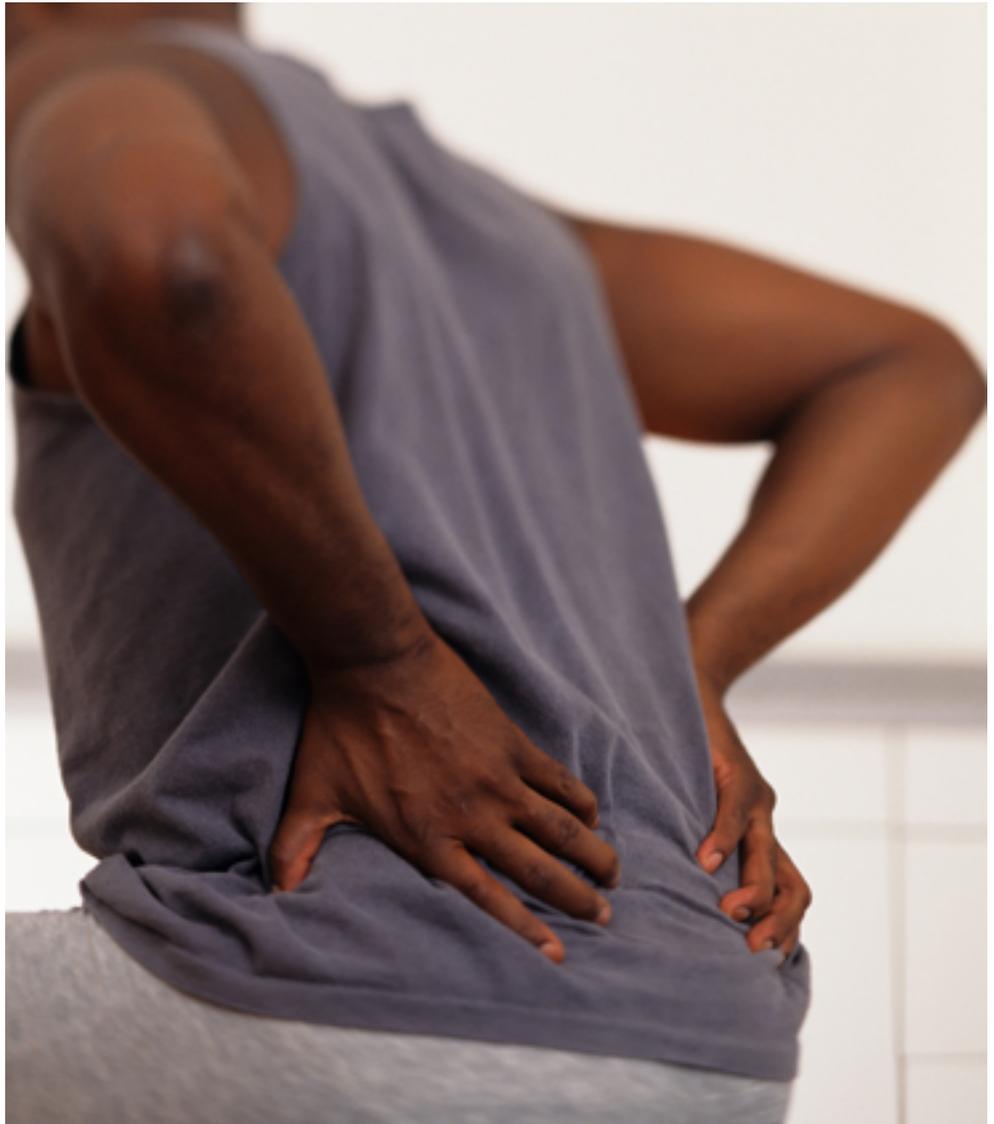
Massage Works

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.

Elimination Effect

Clear Skin Depends on Internal Wellness

Shelley Burns, N.D.

Do you often wonder why a skin blemish has not resolved or why acne outbreaks continue in spite of countless therapies? If so, you may need to dig a bit deeper and look inside--inside your body, that is. Good digestive health and the health of your colon can mean healthy skin.

THE QUESTION IS, HOW?

Both the colon and skin are responsible for absorbing and releasing chemicals, water, and other metabolic products. The colon is the largest internal organ in the body. Its function is specifically to absorb food, nutrients, and water.

One function of skin is to help the body breathe. It inhales and exhales similar to how the lungs work. Inhalation and exhalation by the skin allows it to open pores and perspire. So, sweating is a good thing.

When the colon is unable to get rid of waste produced from food, the colon becomes constipated and toxic. The skin also becomes toxic in trying to perform the elimination function, and often

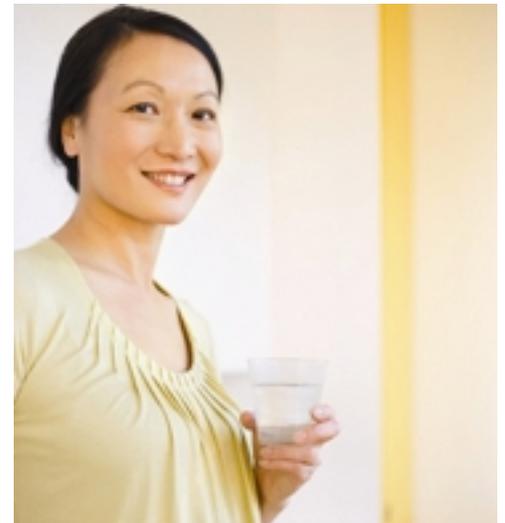
results in skin eruptions in the form of acne, eczema, and psoriasis.

PREVENTION

You can avoid some of this trouble with these tips:

- Consider removing certain foods from your diet--especially dairy. An allergy to milk and other dairy products can cause severe acne.
- Drink at least 64-80 ounces of water every day, as it lubricates the colon and helps with regularity.
- Refrain from dehydrating beverages like alcohol, coffee, and soda, as they can cause constipation.
- Strive for a daily bowel movement--try 1-3 teaspoons of ground flax seeds added to your breakfast.

Beautiful skin starts from the inside out. Adopting these practices will not only improve colon and skin health, but will promote your overall health as well.



Water intake can clarify skin.

The Case for Chocolate

New Studies Show Health Benefits

It's not like we need a specific reason to eat chocolate, but it doesn't hurt that studies are finding increasing health benefits associated with the popular indulgence. While chocolate is high in sugar and saturated fat, it does contain chemical compounds with proven benefits, so enjoy--in moderation--and expect to reap some of these rewards.

Improved Heart Health

A study in the Archives of Internal Medicine found that women over 70 who ate chocolate at least once a week were 35 percent less likely to suffer from heart disease during the survey period. Researchers suspect that the flavonoids found in chocolate, which are known to reduce blood pressure, likely improve overall cardiovascular health.

Reduced Liver Strain

These same flavonoids in dark chocolate that help decrease blood pressure can also reduce post-meal abdominal blood pressure spikes that strain the liver by widening and relaxing blood cells. A Spanish study of patients with end-stage liver disease showed that dark chocolate helped reduce some of the risks associated with conditions like cirrhosis.

Safer Pregnancy

Dark chocolate has been shown to help pregnant women avoid preeclampsia--a significant complication where blood pressure spikes to dangerous levels--by nearly 40 percent when consumed five times a week. Dark chocolate is especially rich in theobromine, which relaxes

muscles and dilates blood vessels. As an additional benefit, it also seems to improve circulation in the placenta.

Increased Endurance

Research out of the University of California, San Diego, demonstrated that mice given epicatechin, a flavonoid found in dark chocolate, could run for 50 percent longer than those who only drank water. The mice also grew new capillaries and mitochondria in their muscles, changes that explain their enhanced endurance capacity. Unfortunately, perhaps, for chocolate lovers, is that researchers say just one-sixth of 1 ounce of chocolate each day is the ideal serving size to receive this benefit.

Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths.

-Etty Hillesum

Thoughts blown away...

Holidays have you feeling a bit stressed? Here's a simple meditation using wind chimes. You can practice this technique indoors by using a fan to play your wind chimes or outside on a warm, breezy day.

Begin this meditation with the intention of letting go of your thoughts and opening to deeper relaxation.

Sit comfortably, with your spine straight and your shoulders and back relaxed.

Breathe deeply and slowly, letting your forehead and the area above the bridge of your nose relax.

Notice the breeze and listen to the wind chimes.

Imagine your thoughts gently blowing away on the breeze. With each chime, let more worries, thoughts, and stresses drift away.

Slowly bring the meditation to an end, welcoming your thoughts back and giving thanks for this gentle meditative practice.

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1101 South Blvd, Suite 102
Charlotte, NC 28203



Member, **Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals**