

A SHOW OF HANDS

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

Holding Headaches at Bay

Bodywork Eases Migraines and Tension Headaches

Cathy Ulrich

"Do you get headaches?" I asked Cindy. She had come to see me for massage to address her neck and shoulder pain but hadn't mentioned headaches.

"Well, yes," she said. "I've always had headaches and, now that you mention it, they seem to be worse when my neck hurts." Cindy went on to say she suffered from them as often as 2-3 times a week and typically treated them with ibuprofen.

Like many Americans, Cindy suffers from chronic, frequent headaches. Her neck pain finally prompted her to seek help, but she was so used to the headaches, she thought they were something she simply had to live with.

MIGRAINES.

Migraine headaches occur when the blood vessels in the brain become dilated, usually due to a chemical reaction, such as food allergies or a stress response. They often start with visual disturbances and quickly develop into severe head pain accompanied by nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and sensitivity to light. They're usually felt on one side of the head, but can be on both sides. Migraines are often managed with medications and avoidance of foods known to trigger them, such as red wine, chocolate, aged cheese, and nuts. However, some bodywork techniques can also be effective in easing migraines or decreasing the frequency of these painful headaches.

TENSION HEADACHES.

Exaggerated by stress, tension headaches are related to poor posture, jaw problems (such as temporomandibular joint disorder, or TMJ), and neck pain. Many people describe a headache that starts at the base of the skull and then moves in an arc over the ears and behind

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It always seems impossible until it's done.

-Nelson Mandela



Freedom from chronic headaches is an option many Americans don't even realize is possible.

What Cindy didn't understand was that frequent headaches are not normal and, with a little proactive planning, there is something that can be done to manage and even prevent them.

Types of Headaches

Headaches come in many varieties. Following is a short list of the most common types.

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the eyes. Tension headaches are most often caused or exacerbated by poor posture, work station positions, and body mechanics, creating undue stress on the upper neck muscles.

MIXED HEADACHES.

The term mixed headache is used to describe a tension headache that leads to a migraine. Typically, the tension headache starts first and the chemicals produced from the pain of it create conditions for a migraine to develop. In people with patterns of mixed headaches, the best way to avoid the onset of a migraine is to treat the tension headache.

Bodywork Options

A treatment regimen that includes bodywork, attention to body position, and stress management can help prevent or greatly reduce the frequency of headaches, in turn reducing your reliance on medication and the need to avoid food triggers. There are many different bodywork techniques, each with specific approaches for treating headaches. Following is a short list of techniques often effective in treating recurring headaches.

SWEDISH MASSAGE.

A tension headache, by its very name, implies the presence of stress and tension. Swedish massage, on the other hand, promotes relaxation and relieves muscle tension. When muscles become tight due to stress or poor posture, they eventually adapt a chronically shortened state. Swedish massage teaches the body how to let go of muscle tension and resets muscle tone.

INTEGRATIVE BODYWORK.

Rolfing, Hellerwork, Structural Integration, and CORE are examples of the types of bodywork designed to improve posture and structural alignment. A primary cause of chronic headaches is poor posture, which produces tension in the neck and shoulders because the weight of the head is not properly balanced on top of the spine. Integrative bodywork can produce lasting postural change for greater ease of movement. By selectively freeing the soft tissues, integrative bodywork literally can change postural alignment and remove the stresses and strains on the muscles that cause headaches.

DEEP TISSUE THERAPIES.

The integrative therapies mentioned above, as well as neuromuscular therapy and myofascial release, use similar techniques to free connective tissue. A chronically tensed muscle tends to maintain that tension, even after the stressful event has passed. Deep tissue techniques free the connective tissue glue, creating a new way for the muscle to function.

REFLEXOLOGY.

Like acupuncture, reflexology works to move energy blockages in the body. By stimulating points on the feet that correspond to organs in the body, reflexologists can promote relaxation, reduce pain, and restore energy flow. Several scientific studies have shown that reflexology is a viable treatment for migraines, in some cases working as well as, or better than, medication--and without the side effects.

CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY.

Craniosacral therapy addresses the inherent, gentle, rhythmic movement of the bones in the skull and their effect on the fluid that surrounds, bathes, and cushions the brain and spinal cord and runs throughout the body. Cranial bones move in miniscule amounts as a response to the production and absorption of cranial fluid. With head trauma, whiplash injury, or even severe stress, cranial bone movement can be compromised, resulting in headaches, dizziness, ringing in the ears, or vision disturbances. This therapy restores the normal movement of the cranial bones and fluid.

By addressing the root of the problem, regularly scheduled bodywork sessions can greatly reduce headaches as well as your need for medication. Remember, headaches are not normal, and you don't have to live with them.



Reflexology has proven as, or more, effective than medication--without the many side effects.

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.

Easing Holiday Angst

Five Stress Busters for a Joyous Season

You enter the holiday season with the best of intentions -- looking forward to time spent with family and friends, decorating, shopping, baking. But as soon as you pile holiday activities on top of an already busy life, you're likely to find yourself relating more to Ebenezer Scrooge than Martha Stewart.

Consider these five suggestions to keep holiday stress at bay:

1. DETERMINE A SHOPPING BUDGET

For many, gift giving is an important part of the holidays, serving as a way to express love and appreciation for friends and family. But when the credit card bills arrive in January, you may discover you've extended your holiday stress well into the New Year. Plan your budget in advance, determine what you can spend, and stick to the plan.

2. CREATE A TIME BUDGET

Many will make a shopping budget, but what about making a time budget? Before accepting every invitation this year, decide ahead how many parties you can and want to attend while maintaining your sanity. Make choices about your time commitments based on what you'd really like to do this year, rather than what you think you should do or what you've always done. Don't forget to leave time for yourself.

3. SET FOOD-INTAKE BOUNDARIES

You'll likely be tempted to eat in excess, and don't be too hard on yourself if you don't stick to your pre-holiday eating standards. But do decide ahead of time just how much you'll deviate from your eating routine.

4. STICK TO YOUR EXERCISE REGIMEN

Regular exercise is a powerful stress buster. You'll feel better, sleep better, avoid weight gain, boost your immune system, and maintain a positive outlook about yourself. While it may seem like an easy time concession to make, don't give in to the idea. Stick to exercise, and you'll thank yourself for it.

5. TAKE TIME TO REST

Take time from your schedule to honor the cycles of the season. The holidays fall during winter solstice -- the shortest day of the year. Learn from nature, and get plenty of rest.

*You only live
once, but if you
do it right, once
is enough.*

-Mae West

Welcome to "MESSAGE U."
Today's Subject: Holiday Wishes

Check your calendar...yes, it IS October...ALREADY! And before we know it, another Holiday Season will have come and gone in a flash. Now is the time of year to reflect on our accomplishments, our families and relationships we hold so dear while remembering the one's we've lost.

With so many things "to do" over the next 3 months, remember to take care of yourself; stay hydrated, eat balanced meals, exercise and most importantly, rest. Here's to wonderful you and may this Holiday Season bring you good health and happiness and a prosperous 2020.

Note: The preceding information is not medical advice. Please check with your doctor prior to starting any new health, exercise or nutrition plan - especially if currently under a doctor's care or if you have any pre-existing medical condition(s).

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