

Your Self-Care Scoop

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

Body Image

Learning to Love Who We Are

The statistics are alarming. The majority of U.S. women--some estimate more than 80 percent--are unhappy with their appearance. At least 10 million young women, and 1 million young men have an eating disorder. Girls as young as 6 and 7 are expressing disapproval of their looks, and most fourth-grade girls are already diet veterans. Most unsettling is the fact that more women, and girls, fear becoming fat than they do dying.

Combating the Images

How do you see yourself? Are you content with the person looking back at you from the mirror each morning or do you frown in frustration?

magazine covers, others are trying to teach young girls to love their bodies, beautiful imperfections and all. One way to combat the Hollywood hype and to create an appreciation for the bodies we have is through hands-on massage and bodywork.

Why Massage Affects Body Perception

Being unhappy with our bodies has serious, and sometimes lifelong, ramifications. Feelings of unworthiness and self-loathing can set up a lifetime of self-deprecating behaviors. What regularly scheduled massage allows us to do is "get back" into our bodies and reconnect with ourselves. Massage can



Massage can help restore feelings of self-worth and nurturing--key for body image issues.

Unfortunately, many of us are unhappy with the person looking back. Whether it's lamenting about having a pear-shaped figure instead of an hourglass, or exhibiting more serious, self-hating body dysmorphic disorders, body image is under siege in our celebrity-fixated society. While Madison Avenue continues to airbrush photos of svelte, 120-pound supermodels for

help us release physical and mental patterns of tension, enhancing our ability to experience our bodies (regardless of their shape and size) in a more positive way. Just as it facilitates our ability to relax, massage also encourages an awareness of the body, often allowing us to more clearly see and

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identify destructive behaviors, including overeating or purging.

Massage also creates a sense of nurturing that is especially powerful when it comes to poor body image. Accepting the nonjudgmental touch of a trained therapist goes a long way toward rebuilding an appreciation and respect for your own body. If we find acceptance for who we are and how we look, we are giving ourselves permission to live comfortably in the skin we have.

The Value of Massage

Research shows that touch is a powerful ally in the quest for physical and mental health. Not only does it help us be more in tune with our bodies, it can also help restore a sense of "wholeness" that is often lost in our segmented, overscheduled lives. When we regain that connection, it's much easier to remember that our bodies are something to be cherished, nurtured, and loved, not belittled, betrayed, and forgotten.

Valuable for every age and every body type, massage and bodywork have innumerable benefits. Here are a few:

- Alleviates low-back pain and improves range of motion.
- Decreases medication dependence.
- Eases anxiety and depression.
- Enhances immunity by stimulating lymph flow.
- Exercises and stretches weak, tight, or atrophied muscles.
- Increases joint flexibility.
- Improves circulation by pumping oxygen and nutrients into tissues and vital organs.
- Releases endorphins--the body's natural painkiller.

Every Shape and Size

Whether a client weighs 30 pounds or 300 pounds, massage and bodywork therapists are trained to appreciate all bodies, without judgment, and to deliver the best care possible. As in any session, a therapist's goal is to create an environment that feels safe and nurturing for clients, all while delivering much needed therapeutic touch. For heavier clients, some minor adjustments might be needed in the delivery of the bodywork, but its nurturing, therapeutic, nonjudgmental role will remain unchanged.

Through the Scars

We also have to remember that a negative body image is not necessarily about those few extra pounds on the hips. It might instead be tied to the scars of past injuries and surgeries. Massage can help here, too. For burn victims, research has shown massage can help in the healing process, while for postsurgery breast cancer patients, massage and bodywork can reintegrate a battered body and spirit. In addition to softening scar tissue and speeding postsurgery recovery, massage and bodywork for these clients is about respect, reverence, and learning to look at, and beyond, the scars.

Finding the Stillness

Experts say that when the tissues start to let go and relax under a massage therapist's hands, profound shifts occur emotionally and physically. A softening happens, and the brain and body begin

to integrate again. The chasm between body and mind that created the eating disorder, or fueled the negative body image, begins to narrow. In her book, "Molecules of Emotion," Georgetown University Medical School professor Candace Pert explains that the body is the "actual outward manifestation, in physical space, of the mind." She says that if we generate negative energy in response to our appearance, it can eventually find its way into reality.

Self-acceptance, then, is paramount for living well, and massage/bodywork is a healthy path to get you there. Finding the stillness in a massage session allows you to just "be," without judgment. Partner that with the comfort that comes from allowing your body to be nurtured by someone else, and we begin to remember our value, regardless of our outward appearance, or what we perceive it to be.



Cultivating a positive sense of self, from the inside out, contributes to a life well lived.

Stay Hydrated

Jennie Hastings Stancu

Has your therapist told you about the importance of drinking water?

After all, our bodies are composed of approximately 60 percent water, and all of our bodily functions are sustained by water. Dehydration is one of the most common detriments to our health, and one of the easiest problems to fix. Make staying hydrated simple and seamlessly interwoven throughout your day.

START EACH DAY OFF RIGHT

Start your morning with a tall, room-temperature glass of water with lemon squeezed into it, before you start taking any tea, coffee, or food. Front-loading hydration is helpful to the body. And be luxurious with your water--for a special treat, add mint, cucumber, or lemon.

HALF YOUR WEIGHT

It is difficult to know how much water is enough. One rule of thumb is to take half your body weight in pounds, and drink that many ounces of water per day.

So if you weigh 150 pounds, this would equal 75 ounces of water. For many of us, however, this might not be enough. If you are working hard, or you live in a particularly dry climate, you might need to drink even more than this.

WHAT ABOUT BPA?

You've probably seen the phrase "BPA free" on water bottles, and you may want to gravitate toward these. BPA stands for bisphenol A, which is a chemical found in polycarbonate plastics and epoxy resins.

According to Mayoclinic.org, some research has shown BPA can seep from a container into foods and beverages, and this is concerning because of possible health effects BPA has on the brain and behavior. Look for non-plastic bottles, or look for the "BPA free" logo.

OTHER DRINKS

Drinking herbal tea is a good way to stay hydrated. You can also augment your hydration with electrolyte-fortified water or sports drinks. However, be

aware that a lot of these drinks have incredibly high levels of sugar in them. Hydration isn't a healthy habit if you drink a day's worth of sugar in every glass. So check the label before you buy.

Jennie Hastings Stancu is a licensed massage therapist and author.



Stay hydrated to keep your body functioning optimally

Secrets of Sleep

Jed Heneberry

We've all heard it before: get your eight hours of sleep and watch your life improve. But the reason we've all heard it is because it's true, and research keeps showing the importance of sleep and its variety of health benefits.

The National Sleep Foundation says there is no "magic number" of hours for optimum sleep benefits, but that different age groups, and even different individuals, need different amounts of sleep. General recommendations are 7-8 hours per night for adults, while children often need 10-11 hours. Getting less than what you need has been linked to an increased risk of diabetes, heart problems, psychiatric conditions, and more.

Here's a quick look at some new findings that reveal the secrets of sleep, and also

how to get more of it.

- **Sleep Suppresses Appetite:** Just one night of sleep loss can increase brain activity in the region that contains appetite sensation in response to food images, increasing the long-term possibility of becoming overweight. "Lack of Sleep Makes Your Brain Hungry," *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology Metabolism*.

- **Naps for Your Noggin:** The right side of the brain, which is generally associated with creativity, is active during so-called power naps, while the left brain remains mostly quiet. While it is not clear what exactly is happening during these brief rest periods, researchers suspect the brain is conducting important memory tasks. "'Power Naps' May Boost Right-Brain

Activity," *Health.com*.

- **Cherry on Top:** Drinking tart cherry juice increased melatonin in study participants, improving sleep efficiency, quality, and time. "Effect of Tart Cherry Juice on Melatonin Levels and Enhanced Sleep Quality," *European Journal of Nutrition*.

In honor of Pride month (which is still going on here in Fort Collins - check out the "Persist with Pride" event this weekend!), this season's newsletter is about body image. It includes a longer article on body image itself, as well as two self-care activities that will help give yours a boost. It should go without saying that we are amazing however we are, but unfortunately it doesn't. One of my favorite things to do is to give a stranger a compliment. I might tell the dancer at a concert I love their moves, or a passer-by that I like their dress. To the kid who is worried how everyone around them is judging them - and I was that kid - it matters. To the 32 year old on my massage table who hates the look of a scar from an accident, it matters. To the 60 year old whose wrinkles and gray hair don't match up with the version of themselves they hold in their mind, it matters. Maybe today you give it a try - when you see something you like, let the person know. You'll be surprised by the sheer happiness it can evoke!

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