

# Massage & Body Maintenance

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## Breathe Into Your Massage

### Mindful Breathing Enhances Bodywork Benefits

Cathy Ulrich

During her massage, Elaine was having trouble relaxing, continually talking about all of the stressors in her life. I took a deep breath and asked her to do the same. Suddenly, her body relaxed and I finally felt her respond to the work I was doing. So, what shifted with that simple suggestion?

#### In The Moment

Elaine was thinking about the stresses in her life instead of where she was at the moment. She was in a safe space, receiving gentle, supportive bodywork. And yet she couldn't relax. By simply asking her to be mindful of her breath, she immediately felt her body and became present with me in that space.

control labor pain. By consciously breathing during contractions, they learn to shift the feeling of pain to just sensation.

Elaine came to see me because she had chronic pain in her foot, knee, and hip. Often chronic pain sets up as a vicious cycle of muscle tightness, impaired blood flow, and more pain, even in areas distant from the original problem. When I asked Elaine to send her breath to the foot, she changed her feeling of pain to simply sensation and this opened a door that allowed me to change the holding pattern in her tissue.

Of course she couldn't physically breathe into her foot, but the imagery of

*~ Stress is like  
an iceberg. We  
can see  
one-eighth of  
it above, but  
what about  
what's below ~*

-Author Unknown



Mindful breathing brings an individual back into their body, facilitating presence and relaxation.

Many meditation traditions use the breath to quiet the mind. With mindful breathing, we're suddenly thrust into an awareness of our inner spaces and a feeling that we actually do live in a body.

#### Reduce Pain

One of the first things expectant mothers learn in natural childbirth classes is breathing techniques to help

sending warm, healing breath into her foot from the inside while I worked on it from the outside changed her relationship to the pain.

Try this simple technique yourself. As you tune into your breath, notice your body. Is there discomfort or pain?

Continued on page 2

#### Office Hours and Contact

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#### In this Issue

**Breathe Into Your Massage**  
**Magical Mango**  
**Probiotics for Skin Health**

Continued from page 1

Breathe in, and think of filling your lungs with healing oxygen. Now breathe out, and imagine sending this warm, healing oxygen directly to the place that hurts. Continue gently breathing into the area for a few minutes. What does it feel like now?

## Relieve Stress

When I worked with Elaine, I noticed that the more she talked about her stressful life, the shallower her breath became. She was breathing high in her chest in short, rapid breaths. Her mind had transported her back to her stressful life, even though she was in a place where she was supported and encouraged to take a break from that stress, putting her body into a fight-or-flight response.

One clear manifestation of this is rapid, shallow breathing. While stress can produce this breathing pattern, the good news is that we can consciously change the breathing pattern and reduce the stress. It works both ways.

As I asked Elaine to slow her breathing and take deeper breaths, the tension in her face softened. Her body relaxed on the table as if she were sinking into the padding. Her feet became warmer, a sure sign that her circulation had changed and that her nervous system had switched from fight or flight to the calming mode of rest and digest.

Try this for yourself. The next time you're feeling stressed, stop for a moment and notice how you're breathing. Is your breath high in your chest? Is it fast and shallow? Now, gently invite your breath to slow down. Start to pull breath into your lungs by letting your belly relax and expand as you inhale. Spend a few moments with yourself and your breath and look at the stressful situation again. Does it seem so bad now?

## Your Massage

Receiving a massage does involve participation on the client's part. While the practitioner is the expert on the bodywork, the clients are the experts on their bodies. In our culture, the client/therapist relationship is often a check-your-body-at-the-door affair. But so much more can happen when the client works with the therapist.

The next time you go for a massage, try these suggestions to achieve mindful breathing and enhance the benefits of your session:

- As you settle onto the table, feel the weight of your body on the table and begin to notice your breath.
- Feel your breath moving of its own accord. Where is it most noticeable? Bring into the spaces that feel less full (without effort--just invite).
- When your therapist starts working, notice the pressure and rhythm. When your practitioner lets up on the pressure, breathe in. When she/he applies pressure, breathe out.
- If your practitioner comes to a tender area, pay special attention to your breath. Work with the tenderness on the exhale, imagining that you're

breathing out the pain.

- As your therapist works on different areas, imagine your breath moving there to meet her. Send your breath wherever she is working. Let her work on the outside, you work on the inside.
- Notice the changes as the massage progresses. Notice your thought patterns. Notice your comfort level. Notice your stress (and how it melts) as you send breath to the various areas of your body.
- When your session is complete and you sit up, notice how your breath feels. What do you notice about your body, the room, the light?

Why not use the lifegiving force of breath to make your next massage an even more beneficial experience. Just breathe.



Being actively aware of your breath during a massage enhances the benefits of your session.

# Magical Mango

*Shelly Burns*

Treating yourself to a mango is a perfect way to add some sunshine to your routine. A mango is more than just a sweet, delicious fruit. It has properties beneficial to skin, including water-soluble vitamins like B2, B3, B6, folic acid (B9), and C. Mango is also a good source of beta-carotene and vitamin A.

Vitamin B complex delays skin's aging process. B vitamins provide a healthy glow, increased tone, and hydrated cells. The anti-inflammatory properties in B3 help skin retain moisture, alleviating dryness and irritation.

Vitamin C protects against the DNA damage that leads to skin cancer. This powerful antioxidant reduces the wrinkling effects of free radical damage, and combats other signs of aging by strengthening collagen and elastin.

Beta-carotene gives mango its wonderful orange color and has an important role in protecting our skin's DNA. Dry, flaky skin can be remedied with the vitamin A

derived from beta-carotene, which is important for repairing and maintaining healthy skin. Vitamin A has also been shown to help reduce and clear acne breakouts.

Other beneficial nutrients found in mango include magnesium, phosphorus, silica, sulfur, and vitamin E. These nutrients each play a role in strengthening the connective tissue in our body, including skin, bone, hair, nails, and muscle.

Mango is not just beneficial to skin. Its nutrients reduce high blood pressure, the risk of stroke, and the chance of contracting heart disease. Mango also contains approximately 20 percent of the recommended dietary intake of fiber and enzymes, which promote healthy digestion.

Mango is especially helpful for long, dry winters, but you can enjoy it at any time of year. It will help you maintain smooth skin and a healthy glow.



**Mango offers a variety of health benefits**

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# Probiotics for Skin Health

## Trust Your Gut on This One!

*Shelley Burns, N.D.*

Digestive health plays an important role in how skin appears on the surface. When digestion is not working optimally, it allows toxins to be reabsorbed in the body instead of being eliminated. The body then mounts a state of emergency as it's overwhelmed by toxins, some of them bad bacteria. These manifest directly on the surface for all the world to see, in the form of wrinkles, blotchiness, skin rashes, and acne.

This is where probiotics come into play. Probiotics contain potentially beneficial bacteria found in the digestive tract--what some call good gut bacteria. They help strengthen the digestive system but they also play an important role in skin health. Probiotics consist of

*Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, and *Bifidobacterium bifidum*. They have anti-inflammatory, anti-pathogenic, and antiallergenic properties and can be used prophylactically and therapeutically.

There have been many studies showing benefits of probiotics to skin health. For example, there's a correlation between an imbalance of good and bad bacteria and the onset of acne. When bringing natural bacteria back into balance with a probiotic intervention, acne improves, in some studies, as much as 50 percent of the time.

There is no recommended daily intake for probiotics, but good food sources include buttermilk, kefir, miso,

tempeh, yogurt, and other fermented foods. Supplements are generally higher in potency and are used for therapeutic purposes in treating irritable bowel syndrome, Crohn's disease, colitis, and many other conditions.

While probiotics are essential for healthy skin and digestive health, there are many other appealing benefits to encourage their use, such as strengthening the immune system, replacing good bacteria after a course of antibiotics, and contributing to general health and well-being.

One note: Some probiotic supplements come from dairy sources and may not be suitable for individuals with dairy allergies or sensitivities.

*~ Its not stress  
that kills us, it is  
our reaction to it*

*~*

-Hans Selye

Stress is a normal psychological and physical reaction to the ever increasing demands of life. That's why stress management is so important. Stress management gives you a range of tools to reset your alarm system. Without stress management, all too often your body is always on high alert. Over time, high levels of stress lead to serious health problems. Don't wait until stress has a negative impact on your health, relationships or quality of life. Start practicing a range of stress management techniques today.

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