

Massage & Body Maintenance

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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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*Butterflies are
self propelled
flowers*

-R. H. Heinlein



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.

Lavender

An Essential Oil for Fundamental Health

Laurie Chance Smith

Lavender essential oil is a one-stop medicine chest, helping to reduce anxiety, fatigue, and stress and balance hormones, increase the immune response, lower blood pressure, and relieve pain. To utilize lavender's healing benefits at home, mix five to 10 drops of lavender essential oil in one ounce of jojoba oil or unscented lotion. (Essential oils shouldn't be applied directly to the skin; it's best to partner them with a carrier oil, liquid, or lotion.)

EARACHES

For earaches, dab one drop of lavender massage oil behind the ear and rub gently. Alternatively, place one drop of lavender oil on a cotton ball and carefully place inside the outer ear.

HEADACHES

Inhaling lavender is also effective for headache relief. Add a few drops to a bowl of warm water and breathe. Gently rub lavender massage lotion on the temples, forehead, and base of the neck.

COLDS

Lavender oil can also help break up coughs and clear sinuses. Colorado-based holistic aromatherapist Nicola McGill suggests the regular home-use of antiseptic essential oils such as lavender to help avoid colds and other infectious diseases. Add a few drops to a vaporizer to help clear colds and infuse the home with lavender's scent.

STRESS

At night, six to eight drops of lavender added to a warm bath helps melt away stress and relieve fatigue. Blend a footbath by adding three drops of lavender to a bowl of warm water, sink your feet in, and relax. For help inducing sleep, add two or three drops of lavender essential oil to the underside corner of your pillow.

TRANQUIL AROMA

A human takes 23,040 breaths a day, and each inhale floods the system with scent. Rely on lavender's tranquil aroma

to clear the way toward peaceful days.



Lavender is loaded with wellness properties.

Massage for Seniors

Bodywork Improves Quality of Life

Almost 35 million Americans are age 65 or older, and about 2,000 more reach this age every day. As the U.S. demographic shifts to an older population, it's important to find ways of helping our elders maintain their health and vitality. Massage for seniors is gaining importance as an alternative therapy to increase quality of life, and many massage therapists are getting special training to better serve this growing population.

SENIORS' SPECIAL NEEDS

While similar in technique to other forms of massage, geriatric massage considers the special needs of the elderly. The specialty trained practitioner knows about positioning for greatest comfort and will often have the client rest in the same position for the entire massage. Mobility challenges

may dictate the massage be done in a bed or wheelchair. The therapist may also work both sides of the body at the same time to enhance body awareness, or only work hands and feet, if the client prefers. Sessions may be limited to 30 to 45 minutes, as older clients often do better with shorter, more frequent, massages.

The geriatric massage therapist is aware of health issues associated with aging and how to safely work with this type of client and with associated physicians. Consequently, the practitioner is able to individualize the massage service based on the client's health, mobility, and comfort level.

BENEFITS OF GERIATRIC MASSAGE

A recent study conducted at the Weaver's Tale Retreat Center in Oregon looked

at the effects of massage for elderly clients. The results of the two-year study showed that participants experienced a decrease in breathing rate of 50 percent and an improvement in range of motion, posture, body awareness, skin color, and muscle tone. Furthermore, it is well documented that caring touch benefits emotional well-being in seniors -- a population at greater risk of suffering from depression.

Massage therapy can add to the quality of a senior's life, both physically and emotionally. Consider booking a session for someone you love, and make a difference in their life.

We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.

- Maya Angelou

Treatment massage is focused on achieving goals, and helping you make significant progress toward better health, less pain, and increased range of motion. Typically treatment massage is used to reduce and eliminate pain, and recover from injury. Sometimes treatment work is uncomfortable during the massage itself, though after the massage the benefits of the work can be felt.

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