

Rocio's Healing Touch

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

How, Exactly, Does Massage Therapy Work?

The Anatomy of Happiness

Douglas Nelson

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As I greeted Craig in the waiting room, the radiant smile on his face told me we were making good progress on his shoulder pain.

"My shoulder is so much better," he remarked as he entered my treatment room. "I hardly think about it anymore." As a massage therapist who specializes in dealing with specific muscular issues, this is exactly what I hope to hear from the people I serve.

"I must say that the educational process has been just as valuable as the hands-on work. It has given me a greater

treatment is the effect on my mood. When I leave your office and go back to work, I seem to function much more efficiently; I get way more stuff done than usual. Mostly, I am in a much better mood, much happier, and more positive about the world. I have really enjoyed understanding how massage helped my shoulder, but now I'd like to understand how massage affects my mood."

Ready to accept the challenge, I jumped in.

"Here is one reasonable explanation based on emerging neuroscience. For many decades, the prevailing wisdom was that emotions are experienced in the

*Be happy for
this moment.
This moment is
your life.*

-Omar Khayyam



Why do you feel so good after a massage?

understanding of my own body, what to do, and maybe more importantly, what not to do. I have a better sense of what was happening to my shoulder and why. This whole process is so interesting and educational.

"I came to see you for help with my shoulder," he continued, "but one of the most striking benefits of my massage

mind and, as a result, those powerful emotions then affect our body. For example, when someone offends us, we have the emotional experience of anger. Shortly thereafter, we experience physical symptoms of anger, such as increased muscle tension, constricted breathing, and an increased heart rate.

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On the other hand, powerful positive emotions like joy and happiness also have corresponding physical effects. Our emotions and thoughts have physical consequences. As it turns out, however, the new scientific understanding reveals that these mind-body experiences are at least bi-directional, if not completely the other way around."

"I'm a little lost," he said. "What do you mean by the other way around?"

"The emerging science is providing some really good evidence that the physical sensation can lead to the emotion, instead of the emotion manifesting as a physical experience."

"Wow, that seems completely backward!" he exclaimed.

"Your mind is always trying to make sense of what the body experiences. The brain needs a reason for what it experiences; we interpret meaning so we know how to respond appropriately. I am sure you can remember being really tense some morning, feeling completely out of sorts. If someone asked you why, you probably couldn't point to any specific offense as the reason. Throughout the morning, however, little things that would normally go unnoticed now really bothered you. You looked for things that were wrong to confirm that the tension you were feeling was perfectly appropriate for the terrible mood you were in. In essence, you created a viable emotional reason to explain your tense physical state."

"I assume that the reverse is also true, correct?" Craig interjected. "A better physical state should have a positive effect on emotions."

"Exactly. This might indeed explain what you experience after a massage. You leave my office with a very different physiology than when you arrived. The optimization of muscle function after massage will be experienced as efficient and effortless movement. The muscle tension in your shoulders is drastically reduced. Your breathing is slower and there is a heightened sense of awareness. Think about the emotional correlate your brain must then assign to this new stream of physical information. When do you normally feel such lack of tension, such lightness and freedom?"

"When I am extremely relaxed, happy, and contented; when the world seems like a wonderful place," he responded.

"The experience of physical ease is then interpreted by the brain as being a sign of emotional ease. Relaxation of the body is also relaxation of the mind, as evidenced by the fact that the same class of drugs (benzodiazepines) given as muscle relaxants is also used in the treatment of anxiety disorders. Furthermore, when you return to work with that emotional framework, it changes what you notice around you as well. Little annoyances don't seem as disturbing. Since attention is selective, your peaceful and positive emotional state predisposes you to notice lots of little blessings that you previously might have overlooked. This process becomes very self-reinforcing."

"I find this subject fascinating," Craig

said. "In fact, after each of our previous sessions, that evening I'd share with my wife some cool anatomy fact or principle I learned from you. I even gave each lesson a name."

"You're kidding," I said, bemused and curious. "If I might ask, what might you call this one?"

"The Anatomy of Happiness," he replied with a smile.

Douglas Nelson is the founder and principal instructor for Precision Neuromuscular Therapy Seminars and president of the 16-therapist clinic BodyWork Associates in Champaign, Illinois. His clinic, seminars, and research endeavors explore the science behind this work. For more information, visit www.nmtmidwest.com, or email doug@nmtmidwest.com.



Your physical state can affect your emotional well-being.

Put Your Best Face Forward

Tess Mauricio

You might be surprised at what can speed up your skin's aging process. Following are several ways to ensure you continue to put your best face forward.

AVOID DRINKING THROUGH STRAWS

I'm sure many of you drink dark sodas, tea, and coffee through a straw to prevent staining your pearly whites or avoid putting your mouth on a can or bottle, right? Unfortunately, it's causing fine lines around your mouth, a sign of premature aging.

TRAIN YOURSELF TO SLEEP ON YOUR BACK

Resting your face on the pillow in the same way every night for years leads to wrinkles, which eventually become etched on the surface of the skin and no longer disappear the next morning.

PULL DOWN THE SHADE IN AN AIRPLANE

You're much closer to the sun in a plane than on land, and ultraviolet (UV) rays, which can penetrate windows, are more intense at higher altitudes. Pilots and flight attendants have been found to be

at an increased risk for melanoma and other skin cancers.

BEWARE BEAUTY CREAMS WITH TOXIC INGREDIENTS

Exposure to some beauty cream chemicals does more harm than good. Know your ingredients and consult with your skin care professional to make the best possible product selections. Some experts caution against the use of creams that contain dimethicone, mineral oil, parabens, paraffin, and petrolatum.

CLEAN GLASSES AND SUNGLASSES

Bacteria on the eyeglass frame will sit directly on your face for an extended period of time. Simply wipe clean with an antibacterial cloth each day.

WASH AWAY CHLORINE

After a dip in the pool or hot tub, wash your face with a cleanser to remove all chemical residues, and be sure to moisturize afterward.

Tess Mauricio, MD, is the founder and

owner/operator of multiple cosmetic dermatology centers throughout Southern California. She is currently a fellow of the American Board of Dermatology, and diplomate of the American Academy of Dermatology. Learn more online at www.scrippsderm.com.



Wash your face to remove residue.

Sleep and Your Skin

Shelley Burns

We have all encountered a sleepless night or two. Upon waking, we look in the mirror and are traumatized by what we see: puffy eyes, dark circles, droopy eyelids, and sallow skin. To add insult to injury, more wrinkles may be visible due to tossing and turning. Poor sleep for a prolonged time is a recipe for disaster.

There are three hormones affected when we don't get adequate amounts of sleep. These are cortisol, growth hormone, and melatonin, and they all have a direct effect on how our skin ages.

CORTISOL

is our stress response hormone. When we are not sleeping well, we're like a battery that does not have the chance to recharge. Our body identifies this as a stressful situation and starts producing cortisol. Like a jolt of caffeine, this spike in cortisol keeps us moving, but at

a cost. Elevated cortisol levels break down collagen, resulting in less skin elasticity.

GROWTH HORMONE

is responsible for building muscle, bone, and tissue--including skin. It is one of our antiaging hormones that replenishes as we sleep, rehydrating the skin and allowing for cellular repair.

MELATONIN

is our sleep hormone, and it also plays a role in the immune system. It is a significant contributor to the functional and physical integrity of our skin.

Without quality sleep, growth hormone and melatonin are not produced in sufficient quantities, while cortisol is overproduced. The result is overall poor skin condition, including dryness, dullness, fine lines, and wrinkles.

Even how you position your face on your pillow affects your skin. Sleeping on your back will avoid the risk of "sleep lines."

While there are some over-the-counter supplements to remedy sleeplessness, it's far better to eat well, exercise regularly, and develop healthy sleep habits (at least seven uninterrupted hours every night) to let the body regulate its hormones in a natural way. And don't forget to schedule your massage!

Shelley Burns, a doctor of naturopathic medicine, completed studies at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, and has certification in complementary and integrative medicine from Harvard University.

*Try to be a
rainbow in
someone's cloud.*

-Maya Angelou

Get 4 (60-minutes) Deep Tissue Massages Package For \$199.99 or 4 (60-minutes) Swedish For \$180. To get this package just ask for it next time you visit us.

You could also book your massage and purchase the package when scheduling online at www.rocioshealingtouch.com/booking.

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