

### research report

Massage has been used in every culture throughout history. Not only because it feels so good, but because of its profound effects on health and well-being. The healing powers of this ancient healing art are slowly being revealed to modern researchers as they uncover its effects on a wide range of conditions ranging from eczema and bulimia to HIV and diabetes.

Until about ten years ago, the benefits and effects of massage were not well understood. Massage therapists knew that it could increase blood and lymph circulation, decrease heart rate and blood pressure, improve mobility and reduce people's pain. However, the impact of massage on the wide range of conditions that a massage therapist treats

had never been scientifically examined.

### massage under the microscope

That situation changed when the first institute devoted exclusively to the study of touch was created in 1992 - the Touch Research Institute.

The driving force behind the Touch Research Institute is its director Tiffany Field. Motivated by the death of her own child, she obtained a research grant in 1975 to study child development.

Ten years later, as an assistant professor of pediatrics and psychology at the University of Miami, she was looking for ways to help premature infants develop faster. She noted that

### the power of massage

Studies from the Touch Research Institute have looked at people of all ages with a variety of health conditions and complaints. The range of benefits is remarkable. Here are some highlights from a few of the many published studies.

- ◆ Labor pain: Massage during the first 15 minutes of each hour of labor decreased the mother's anxiety and pain. There was less need for medication and the length of labor was shortened.
- ◆ Migraine headaches: Massage therapy decreased the occurrence of headaches along with sleep disturbances and distress symptoms.
- ◆ Asthma: Children with mild to severe asthma who received regular massage were better able to exhale (a problem with asthma because the air passages constrict). In addition, the children suffered less stress and anxiety.
- ◆ Premenstrual symptoms: After massage therapy there was improved mood and a decrease in anxiety. Pain and symptoms of water retention were also reduced.
- ◆ Juvenile diabetes: After a month of regular massage, average blood sugar levels dropped into a normal range. The massaged children were also more likely to stick with their treatment regime.
- ◆ Sexual abuse: Following massage, abuse survivors showed a reduced aversion to touch. They were less depressed, less anxious and had lower levels of stress hormones.
- ◆ Bulimia: Bulimic teenagers received massage twice weekly for five weeks. The girls had an improved body image and felt less anxious and depressed. Results were similar for those with anorexia.
- ◆ Pregnancy: Women who had massage through pregnancy showed decreased levels of stress hormones and experienced less anxiety. There were fewer complications before and after birth including fewer premature births.

***“With the same level of food intake, massaged infants gained weight 47% faster than the other premature infants”***

babies sucking pacifiers developed more quickly. If a little stimulation helped them grow, she reasoned, a lot of stimulation like massage might have a more significant effect.

## helping premies grow

This led to a landmark study in 1986 on the effects of massage on premature infants. What the researchers found was remarkable. With the same level of food intake, massaged infants gained weight 47% faster than the other premature infants. In addition, they were more alert, active and responsive, tolerated noise better, slept more deeply and had fewer episodes of apnea. To the hospital's benefit, the infants left the hospital six days earlier at a cost savings of \$10,000 per infant.

Given the positive results of the study, other studies examining the benefits of massage on infants and children began. The CEO of Johnson & Johnson heard of the research and provided the initial funding for the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami.

Since then, the scope of research on massage has expanded dramatically. In addition, four other research centers have come into being to assist with various studies, including two in the USA, one in France and another in the Philippines. Collectively these Touch Research Institutes have conducted over 90 studies on the benefits of massage with more on the way.

## for the stressed and depressed

We all know from experience that massage can be incredibly relaxing. Not only does it relax your tense muscles, but it causes a generalized relaxation response. This response initiates various restorative processes in your body and counters the negative effects of stress.

It is interesting to note that despite making you more relaxed, massage will enhance your mental function. In a relaxed state your brain wave activity changes and your mind can actually process information more efficiently. In one study, employees' performance of math tests became faster and more accurate. With regular massage they were able to do computation tests in about half the time with about half as many errors.

Massage holds incredible promise for those suffering from depression. Researchers have simple tools to measure depression. For this reason, it has been measured in most of the Touch Research Institute's studies. Remarkably, depression has decreased in every study where it has been measured. Massage has been shown to cause the release of hormones like serotonin, dopamine, as well as endorphins, all of which may play a role in fighting depression.

## boosting immunity

Stress was once vital to our survival. Today, researchers are finding that this innate response can be more harmful than the dangers it was meant to protect us from.

One area of particular interest has been the effect of stress on immunity. The classic study highlighting this link was done in 1991 when a researcher showed that people who had high levels of perceived stress were more likely to develop colds when exposed to a virus. More recently, that same researcher found that chronic stress at work increased the chances of catching a cold from three to five times.

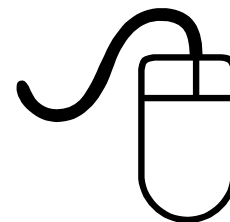
What could be a better antidote to stress than massage? There is a growing body of evidence that massage not only decreases stress, but by doing so can bolster immune function in both the healthy and sick.

In one study, healthy female medical students received a full body massage the day before a stressful academic exam. All the women experienced decreased anxiety. In addition, over half had increases in disease fighting white blood cells and natural killer cell activity to kill invading cells.

In other studies, adults and teens with HIV were massaged over a period of a month. As expected, both groups experienced less anxiety and produced fewer stress hormones. In addition, the subjects showed both increases in the number of natural killer cells and in the killing power of those cells.

In another study, a group of women with breast cancer were divided into either a treatment or non-treatment group. The women in the treatment group received three massages a week for five weeks, with 80% showing improved immune function. Out of the women who did not receive massage, only 30% showed improvements in immunity.

want to **know** more?



Check out the Touch Research Institute web site at:

[www.bodyworkbiz.com/miami](http://www.bodyworkbiz.com/miami)