

# Newsletter – Synergy Massage Therapy

August 2015

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

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

-Omar Khayyam



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?

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#### Office Hours and Contact

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**By Appointment Only**

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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.**

# No Pain, No Gain?

## Bodywork Doesn't Have to Hurt to be Effective

Cathy Ulrich

Some people believe massage must be painful to be effective. While some modalities may be intense, this doesn't necessarily translate to a knuckle-biting experience. In fact, painful bodywork can be counterproductive. If you can't breathe comfortably, want to tighten up, make a face, or curl your toes, the technique is too much for you. Your body will go into a protective mode and actually block any positive change.

"No pain, no gain" just doesn't have to apply when it comes to bodywork. Be sure to provide feedback to your practitioner so that you're on the same page. Think of it as a "scale of intensity." On my scale, zero is not touching you and ten is pain--not the worst pain you've ever felt but the place where you want to hold your breath, tighten up, make a face, leave your body. That's a ten.

You shouldn't ever have to be in a pain range to get results, and be sure to let your practitioner know if you're in an

eight or nine range. They may stay at that level if that's where the therapeutic value will be attained, but again, only if it's manageable and you're not tightening up.

And every single client is different. Not only do individuals all start in different places, but their bodies respond differently, and their pain thresholds are extremely varied. What one person finds heavenly, another calls torture.

If it does feel too painful, be sure to tell your therapist. Usually, a practitioner can simply slow down to ease the intensity without losing therapeutic value. Sometimes, if you are nervous or stressed, just remembering to breathe will make your body more open, and you'll remain comfortable.

Bodywork needn't be a test of how tough you are. By giving your therapist appropriate feedback and understanding that painful techniques aren't really helping your body heal, you'll have a

great experience in the session and feel better afterward.



Therapeutic massage actually feels good.

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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.

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

-Maya Angelou

#### Getting The Most From Your Massage

Did you know there are things you can do to maximize the benefits of massage? If not, I hope by reading this newsletter you have learned a few tips and can put them to use soon.

Warm regards,  
Becky

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