

THE POWER OF TOUCH

Submitted by HOM of Well Being

Over the last several months, we at HOM of Well Being have had a number of people coming in to book a massage or other touch treatment in part because they feel deprived of contact. Many have described feelings of loneliness, depression and hopelessness and although we know full well how important touch is, we did not realize how many people are feeling this way. Social distancing has taken a big toll on people's emotional and physical well-being, and lack of healthy, nurturing touch plays a big role in that.

Studies that have shown that babies (especially premature babies) do not thrive well and can even perish without regular touch. They also do not respond well to stress and can become socially withdrawn.

Children rely on adults to care for them and to help them feel safe and secure, valued and loved. One of the ways to accomplish this is through regular touch and positive demonstrations of affection through hugs, caresses and kisses. When shown love this way, children learn how to receive love and they also learn how to give love. They grow up to be more emotionally strong and are better able to deal with stressors. They tend to have stronger self-confidence and self-esteem.

Adults (especially those of us who are caregivers) also need regular touch and positive attention. As social beings, our social networks are important to our quality of life and there is more chance we will experience happiness, health and longevity. Without positive touch and attention elderly people may feel lonely and depressed and may even 'waste away'.

According to studies done by Tiffany Field, the head of the Touch Research Institute in Miami, "touch appears to stimulate our bodies to react in certain ways. Positive touch can lower blood pressure, heart rate and cortisol levels, stimulate the hippocampus (an area of the brain that is central to memory), and drive the release of a host of hormones and neuropeptides that have been linked to positive and uplifting emotions. The physical effects of touch are far reaching".

In another set of studies "touch was shown to boost the immune systems of people who had been exposed to the common cold".

Author David Linden puts it well when he says "the more we learn about touch, the more we realize just how central it is in all aspects of our lives-cognitive, emotional, developmental, and behavioural-from the womb into old age".

If you are feeling touch deprived you are not alone and reaching out in whatever way you feel comfortable is important.