

Releaf Massage Therapy

March/April 2022 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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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.

Managing Arthritis

Exercise and Bodywork Keep Joint Pain at Bay

The word arthritis strikes fear in the hearts of older adults. It often signifies aging, pain, inactivity, and disability. However, new research shows moderate physical exercise can actually ease arthritis symptoms by decreasing pain and increasing a person's likelihood of living a normal life.

Understanding Arthritis

The most common form of arthritis--osteoarthritis, or also known as degenerative arthritis--affects more than twenty million Americans. Osteoarthritis (literally meaning "bone-joint inflammation") is caused by wear and tear on joint surfaces and most frequently involves the hips, knees, lower back, neck, and fingers. More than half of people over sixty-five have some evidence of osteoarthritis on X-rays, although it doesn't always manifest as symptoms.

Many problems arise from a sedentary lifestyle. Joints lose flexibility and muscles lose strength, feeding the cycle

of pain, inactivity, and more pain.

Exercise Offers Sweet Relief

Vigorous walking, swimming, and bicycling boost the release of powerful endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. When done four to five days a week, these aerobic activities improve general cardiovascular health and aid in weight management (obesity is the single biggest risk factor for osteoarthritis).

Strengthening and stretching exercises targeted at maintaining joint flexibility and muscle strength--especially for at-risk joints--slow the progression of degenerative arthritis. Yoga classes and moderate weight lifting programs are excellent ways to improve strength and flexibility. Bodywork can also provide relief.

If arthritis is slowing you down, get serious with your exercise plan. Consult your physician; work with a professional trainer, physical therapist, yoga instructor, or bodyworker; and start a

gentle, progressive exercise program. Your joints will reward you for it, and you'll free yourself from arthritic pain.



Stretching can slow degenerative arthritis.

The Art of Aromatherapy

Essential Oils Provide Healing and Balance

Aromatic essential oils extracted from herbs, flowers, resin, wood and roots have long been a source of healing, aiding in relaxation, circulation and wound healing. However, the use of these medicinal oils declined as the modern pharmaceutical industry developed. In 1928, French chemist Rene Maurice Gattefosse revived the use of essential oils and developed the art and science of utilizing naturally extracted aromatic essences from botanicals to balance and harmonize the health of body, mind, and spirit. Gattefosse coined the practice aromatherapy.

Because of aromatherapy's affect on emotional health, many practitioners incorporate this noninvasive treatment into their practices. Dispensers or diffusers filled with aromatic essences

may be used to scent the room, and specific essential oils are used on the client's skin during massage. Because each oil has unique characteristics and benefits, the choice of oil or oils can be customized to the client's needs and emotional state. Whether inhaled or applied topically, aromatherapy requires an understanding of how each essential oil interacts with the body, as well as the mind. Many pure essential oils need to be diluted, as they can cause irritation when applied directly to the skin, and training is necessary to guarantee safe and correct usage.

The emotions listed below can be gently eased by one or a combination of the following essential oils:

Anxiety: bergamot, cedarwood, clary sage, frankincense, lavender, patchouli,

Roman chamomile, rose, sandalwood.

Fatigue, Burnout: basil, ginger, grapefruit, jasmine, lemon, peppermint, rosemary, sandalwood.

Stress: bergamot, frankincense, geranium, lavender, mandarin, neroli, patchouli, Roman chamomile, ylang ylang.

Anger: jasmine, neroli, orange, patchouli, petitgrain, Roman chamomile, rose, vetiver, ylang ylang.

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

-Maya Angelou

Less that 3 weeks until spring, but who's counting ;)

We keep trucking along here at Releaf, and love that we continue to grow with you all through the ebbs and flows of life.

Evan will be adding availabilty in March every other Fri.

Happy Spring!
Andrea Cain

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