

deeper breathing, more relaxed muscles, and better internal circulation and digestion. Certain massage techniques, especially long smooth stroking movements, are known to trigger the relaxation response.⁷

Physical Relief: Chronic stress often leaves chronic muscular tension, trigger points, and poor circulation. These problems respond well to traditional massage techniques, deep tissue massage, and other forms of therapeutic bodywork.⁸ Stress may also block or distort energy flow within the body. Examples of therapeutic massage and bodywork systems which work directly to restore the free flow of energy include acupressure, Polarity Therapy, and Therapeutic Touch.⁹

Mental Relief: Massage can be thought of as a one hour vacation from stress — a get-away from life and its challenges. During a massage you create a peaceful space and give yourself permission to relax. Recent research has confirmed that massage for relaxation reduces anxiety and increases feelings of well-being.¹⁰

Healthy Pleasure: In the book, *Healthy Pleasures*, the benefits of therapies using touch are highly praised. Because it is a sensory pleasurable experience, therapeutic massage contributes to healthy immune system functioning, and general well-being.¹¹

Enhancing the Relaxation Effects of Massage

Your massage therapist can not force you to relax, but can create an environment conducive to relaxation. Here are some tips to help you create a relaxing massage experience:

- The room should be warm with low and/or indirect lighting.
- Leave beepers and cellular phones outside.
- Express your intent to relax. Your massage therapist can then choose techniques appropriate for relaxation.
- Tell the massage therapist about specific places where you feel tension.
- Keep talking to a minimum.
- Use the massage as a form of meditation.
- Give yourself permission to relax and enjoy the pleasure of the massage.

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Antidote to STRESS

Restores balance



THERAPEUTIC
MASSAGE

For a Healthier Life

Antidote to Stress

Balanced Life — Optimal Health

It is well known that a balanced life is essential to optimal health. Balance in diet, exercise, work and play, and social relationships plays an important role in physical and mental well-being. In today's fast-paced world, one of our greatest health challenges is to balance the effects of stress in our lives.

Hans Selye, a noted researcher of stress and its effects on humans, emphasized that stress is the "spice of life."¹ The right amount of stress keeps life interesting, stimulating, and worthwhile. But too much stress, and especially stress unrelieved over a long period of time, can have a negative impact on the quality of our lives and our health.

Stress can accumulate over time and lead to chronic tension and anxiety, feelings of being "stressed-out," and a modern problem called "hurry sickness." It is not surprising that many of the illnesses plaguing modern humanity are either directly related to or greatly aggravated by too much stress.²

Most experts agree that long term use of medication to relieve stress is counterproductive. Some healthy and time-honored methods recommended for balancing stress include recreation and hobbies, holidays and vacations, fresh air and exercise, time at the spa or health club, and relaxing therapeutic massage.

What is a Stressor?

A stressor is a situation, event, or demand which disrupts a person's equilibrium, and triggers a bodily reaction called the stress response. Life is full of challenges that may be considered stressors.

Well-known psychosocial stressors include death of a loved one, divorce or separation, legal troubles, change of residence, and unemployment. Less obvious stressors include noise, crowding, biochemical stressors (heat, cold, pollutants, poor nutrition), and even personal philosophical issues (values conflict, lack of purpose). Illness and injury are physical stressors, which may be compounded by accompanying fear, anxiety and disruption of normal activities. Any change in an established life pattern is a potential source of stress.

People react to stressors differently. What may be a major stressor to one person may not trigger the stress response in another. Our attitude towards life's challenges is a major factor in how stressors affect us.³

The Stress Response

The body responds to stressors with what is called the "fight or flight" or "stress response." It is a primitive adaptation designed to help us either confront or flee from a real physical danger. Anyone narrowly escaping a traffic collision has experienced the "fight or flight" response — the pounding heart, wide-eyes, holding your breath.

Commonly referred to today as the "stress response," this physiological mechanism is triggered when a person is presented with a real or imagined threat to their well-being. During the stress response, the endocrine and autonomic nervous systems activate a series of bodily changes including faster heart rate, faster and shallower breathing, increased perspiration, greater muscular tension, elevated body temperature, more coagulants in the blood, dilated pupils, constriction of pilomotor muscles (goose bumps), rerouting of blood away from internal organs, slow digestion, dry mouth, and overall increase in body metabolism.

This same stress response occurs if we only imagine a physical danger, as in reading an adventure novel or watching a scary movie. It may also be induced by psychological threats such as the fear of speaking in front of a group of people, interviewing for a job, meeting deadlines — anything which a person perceives as a threat to his/her well-being.

The strength of the response is related to the degree of immediate danger perceived. The greater and more



immediate the danger, the greater the response. A chronic but low grade response may not be noticeable, especially if a person becomes accustomed to being under stress. Many people don't realize how much stress they are under, or have forgotten what it feels like to relax.

The stress response is a natural survival mechanism designed to be a temporary response to an immediate threat. The body is meant to return to normal functioning once the threat is gone. A prolonged stress response with no relief is what causes the physical and mental ills associated with stress.⁴

Signs of Too Much Stress

Signs that your optimal level of stress has been exceeded include chronic muscle tension (especially in the neck and back), short temper, anxiety, excessive worry, insomnia, chronic fatigue, general nervousness, feeling "burnt-out" or "stressed out." People experiencing too much stress are frequently more clumsy and forgetful than usual, and may be involved in more accidents. These are the signs of "stress gone bad" or "distress."

The physical component of distress is revealed in figures of speech like "carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders," and "pain in the neck." Chronic health problems associated with a prolonged stress response include tension headache, backache, ulcers, colitis, blood sugar irregularities, high blood pressure, and heart disease.⁵

Chronic stress has been proven to impair the immune system — our first defense against many diseases ranging from the common cold to cancer. Thus too much stress has a general negative effect, leaving us vulnerable to many diseases, and inhibiting recovery as well.⁶

How Therapeutic Massage Helps

Therapeutic massage helps restore balance, and brings the body back to normal by triggering the relaxation response. Massage also relieves many of the mental and physical problems caused by prolonged stress.

Relaxation Response: The relaxation response is literally the flip-side of the stress response, bringing the body back to normal function. The endocrine and autonomic nervous systems activate bodily changes resulting in a "sigh of relief" — slower heart rate,