

Happy Valentine's

February 2024

Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

Stop Judging Your Beautiful Self

Massage Fits You (yes, YOU!)

Rebecca Jones

Sol Benson loathed her body. It went beyond mere embarrassment at how "fat" she was. Deeper still was the conviction that her body was unworthy of love, underserving of nurturing.

And it was that alienation from her own body that for years kept Benson, a professional dancer who has waged a lifelong battle with anorexia, from getting massage. "I stayed away because getting a massage was being good to myself," said the 45-year-old Colorado mother of two, whose own mother and brother are massage therapists. "If I'm on a weight loss cycle, it's like 'I don't deserve love, I don't deserve food, I don't deserve to feel good about myself.'"

Benson explains, that helped the process. Her nonjudgmental ways helped Benson maintain balance. If, however, Rose had brought up weight, or in this case, the lack thereof, Benson admits it could have sent her into another purging cycle.

Managing Body Image

Benson's story illustrates just how complex the issues of body image can be in 21st century America and just how valuable bodywork is in mending distorted body image.

Developing a positive body image is about becoming present, grounded, open, aware, and unafraid to find what's

*Why did the little girl color her valentine pink rather than red? She was feeling...
-lighthearted!*



Self-acceptance is the first step to a healthier lifestyle and a happy relationship with yourself.

Benson credits Mary Rose--a Boulder, Colorado, massage therapist who has developed a special style of acupressure for the physically fragile--with understanding her psychological fragility enough to help her turn massage into a tool for healing, rather than a doorway to despair.

at the core and work through it. It's about being mindful, and listening to what your body has to say--a big step on the way to a healthier lifestyle and not necessarily an easy one to take. It requires courage and hard work to learn self-acceptance. And bodywork can play a key role in this endeavor.

It was the tender care from Rose,

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With America in the grip of an obesity epidemic--while at the same time holding up waif-like thinness as a cultural ideal--many people are worried about excess pounds and the harsh judgments that accompany them. Embarrassment at the thought of uncovering imperfect bodies for the close contact of a massage or bodywork session drives away untold numbers of potential clients.

The problem isn't limited to issues of weight. Many people avoid massage because of embarrassment about acne, surgical scars, birthmarks they consider unsightly, or some other physical deformity or flaw.

"A really common one is, 'I have such ugly feet,'" Rose says. "I always laugh and say that in 20 years, I haven't seen an ugly foot yet. People just have bad attitudes about their feet. In general, people are so self-judgmental."

Relax, Really

Massage therapists specialize in the human body. They don't judge; rather, they see anatomy.

"This is something that's so prevalent and something we deal with daily," says Jonathan Burt, 27, a Detroit massage therapist and massage instructor. "I can't tell you how often I've heard, 'I have to wait until I get into shape before I come in for a massage.' Clients think they have to be in shape before they can relax." Newsflash: Relaxation is not exclusive to model body types.

Given the increased blood flow that results from massage, as well as the benefits to the lymphatic and other body systems, Burt believes overweight people and others who suffer from limited mobility are the people most likely to benefit from a good massage. That's why he especially treasures his larger clients.

The idea of taking your clothes off for a massage is often more intimidating than the reality. In fact, practitioners make draping an art form, ensuring the client doesn't feel exposed. And by the way, says Burt, you're not the only imperfect body around here. "We all have flaws," says Burt, who gave his first massage at age seven, when his grandmother, a double amputee, asked him to massage her stumps. "Myself, I'm not the

American Gladiator. I inform people I have flaws as well, and I'd be more than willing to help them overcome their self-consciousness."

Viewpoint: Compassion

We're all in this together, and your massage therapist is operating from a place of compassion. Your practitioner is there to create and hold a safe space for you. Says Charlie Murdach, 38, a Portsmouth, New Hampshire, massage therapist, "For me, it's meeting the person where that person is and addressing that person in an appropriate and compassionate way."

Murdach, who has been a massage therapist since 1990, says he has yet to meet a potential client that he can't help, regardless of that person's physical condition. He believes this is due to the massage therapist's ability to avoiding

forcing anything, but to also being open to the possibility that miracles can happen.

Murdach explains your practitioner's role: "Whatever is going on with that person, whether it's a deformity or some type of disability, I make sure I can step up and hold the waters calm for that person. It doesn't matter if they're missing an arm, or have a deformed hand, the person who is standing there desires to move forward."

Getting a massage can do wonders for body image and help bridge the disconnect between the physical and emotional. A wounded psyche can lead you to believe you don't deserve a massage; this is when you most do! You are worthy--book your massage today.



Bodywork can boost self-esteem and confidence, and even improve body image.

Afternoon Essential Oils

Jeanne Rose

It's easy to enjoy the benefits of aromatherapy, even when you're not in the therapy room. Here are some ways to incorporate facets of aromatherapy into your daily routine, and even into your lunchtime!

Consider having a protein-filled lunch of 4 ounces of chicken breast mixed with salad. Make sure your salad includes at least six red and green items combined, such as cucumber, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, bell peppers, and radishes. Add chopped basil, sage, or sweet marjoram. Make a simple dressing of olive oil and lemon juice. Add culinary essential oils such as dill weed and black pepper. Have a glass of aromatic iced herbal tea, and add to it 1 teaspoon of melissa hydrosol. This is tasty and encourages deep thinking and relaxation. If, however, you need to continue your workday, then add 1 teaspoon of rosemary hydrosol to your lunchtime iced tea.

Why not take a five-minute scented breather for an afternoon break. The

aromatic properties of plants are effective tonics and energizers. Dabbing the temples with essential oils or spraying the nape of the neck with hydrosols of rosemary or peppermint is a wonderful way to implement the potent effects of these distilled plant materials. You can also use a mixture of distilled water with essential oils of peppermint, sage, and basil dissolved in alcohol (10 drops essential oil, 20 drops alcohol, and a half-ounce of water). Basil and peppermint herb, and their essential oils, have been used for centuries as a mental stimulant.

Complete your afternoon break by lying down for 3-5 minutes with a couple of slices of fresh cucumber on the eyes. Cucumber contains enzymes that help soften the skin. If the day's work has brought on a headache, a drop of rosemary oil to the temples or around the ears works wonders.

Jeanne Rose has been teaching and researching natural remedies for 30 years, beginning with her

first book, *Herbs Things*.



Find out which essential oil works best for you.

The Case for Chocolate

New Studies Show Health Benefits

It's not like we need a specific reason to eat chocolate, but it doesn't hurt that studies are finding increasing health benefits associated with the popular indulgence. While chocolate is high in sugar and saturated fat, it does contain chemical compounds with proven benefits, so enjoy--in moderation--and expect to reap some of these rewards.

Improved Heart Health

A study in the Archives of Internal Medicine found that women over 70 who ate chocolate at least once a week were 35 percent less likely to suffer from heart disease during the survey period. Researchers suspect that the flavonoids found in chocolate, which are known to reduce blood pressure, likely improve overall cardiovascular health.

Reduced Liver Strain

These same flavonoids in dark chocolate that help decrease blood pressure can also reduce post-meal abdominal blood pressure spikes that strain the liver by widening and relaxing blood cells. A Spanish study of patients with end-stage liver disease showed that dark chocolate helped reduce some of the risks associated with conditions like cirrhosis.

Safer Pregnancy

Dark chocolate has been shown to help pregnant women avoid preeclampsia--a significant complication where blood pressure spikes to dangerous levels--by nearly 40 percent when consumed five times a week. Dark chocolate is especially rich in theobromine, which relaxes muscles and dilates blood vessels. As an additional benefit, it also seems to

improve circulation in the placenta.

Increased Endurance

Research out of the University of California, San Diego, demonstrated that mice given epicatechin, a flavonoid found in dark chocolate, could run for 50 percent longer than those who only drank water. The mice also grew new capillaries and mitochondria in their muscles, changes that explain their enhanced endurance capacity. Unfortunately, perhaps, for chocolate lovers, is that researchers say just one-sixth of 1 ounce of chocolate each day is the ideal serving size to receive this benefit.

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of amazing!*

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