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TOUCH 'N STUFF
FEBRUARY 2009 NEWSLETTER

WHAT'S NEW?

- Lee-Ann now has a hand held percussor to help loosen up tough and stubborn muscles.
- Solomon Massage says hello to beautiful professionally printed gift certificates (for sale), and happily says goodbye to the home-made ones.
- In a conscious effort to avoid products with parabens, Lee-Ann has returned to using gel oil again. "Hypoallergenic" lotion and organic cream is available for those with sensitive skin, and should you have concerns about potential irritation, just ask to see the ingredient lists.

The definition of "TOUCH" is "physical contact". Here are some synonyms that were listed for the word:

- *brush, caress, collision, communication, contact, contingence, crash, cuddle, embrace, feel, fondle, graze, grope, handle, hit, hug, impact, kiss, manipulation, nudge, palpate, pat, peck, perception, percussion, pet, push, rub, scratch, shock, stroke, tactility, tap, smack, punch, bump, vibrate, shake, clap, squeeze, pinch, knead*

Evidently, there are many different ways of touching another human being or animal: positive, negative and neutral. The experience of touch is defined by two things: the intention of the giver and the perception of the receiver. Most of us have appreciated a well meaning pat on the back, squeeze of the shoulder, or supportive hug, especially during tough times.

The Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine is the first center in the world devoted solely to the study of touch and its application in science and medicine. A distinguished team of researchers, representing Duke, Harvard, Maryland, etc, conduct studies to better define touch in the promotion of health and treatment of disease. Research efforts that began in 1982 and continue today have shown that touch therapy has numerous beneficial effects on health and well-being. **Significant**

findings on the positive effects of massage therapy are:

- **enhanced growth** (e.g., preterm infants)
- **diminished pain** (e.g., fibromyalgia)
- **decreased autoimmune problems** (e.g., increased pulmonary function in asthma and decreased glucose levels in diabetes)
- **enhanced immune function** (e.g., increased natural killer cells in HIV and cancer)
- **enhanced alertness and performance** (e.g., EEG pattern of alertness and better performance on math computations).

Many of these positive effects appear to be mediated by decreased stress hormones. An overused word, perhaps, but stress tends to be very underrated in the effect it has on the physical body. Stress is the internal response to emotional or physical threats, whether actual or imagined. Being in a constant state of pain due to trauma or disease is also stressful. The normal stress response includes:

- a state of alarm and adrenaline production
- short-term resistance (as a coping mechanism)
- exhaustion

If the "threat" is ongoing, and the stress response is "on" continuously, eventually the human or animal body becomes unable to respond appropriately. Common stress symptoms include irritability, muscular tension,



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inability to concentrate, headaches, accelerated heart rate, anxiety, and depression – all of which are frequently listed on health history forms coming into my office. Are you seeing the mind-body connection here? And what are you doing to manage your stress? While exercise, meditation and screaming into your pillow are all good outlets, blowing off the steam isn't ALL of the solution. You may need to consider the origins of what is stressing you out, and make some changes. Are you a "yes-man"? Start saying "No thanks, I just can't take that on right now", and see where you can delegate or share some tasks with other parents, friends, family or co-workers to ease your load. Perhaps something unacceptable happened to you a long time ago that needs to be brought to the surface and dealt with through counseling, self help books, and homeopathic remedies (to address the impact of the event on your cellular memory). Taking time for yourself to have your aching muscles kneaded and loosened through massage will also help you reconnect your mind with your body, putting you a bit more in tune with your physical and emotional self. We tend to ignore our aches and pains to the point where we suddenly notice we're desperate for a massage, and we need one NOW. So what does that say for taking the time to acknowledge and address our other needs?

Studies done on infant chimps and other animals where they were deprived of touch, show that devastating long term effects can reach into adulthood (physiological, behavioral and social development). Inappropriate or violent touch, such as assault, rape, or childhood sexual abuse, has long term consequences as well. In my work, I've perceived the results of these in a number of individuals -- through my hands, general observations, and ultimately confirming by asking the right questions. As adults, we can still benefit from positive touch

therapy, such as massage. Even man's best friend knows the difference between being petted and being massaged! Try massaging your dog (or any dog!) on the head, shoulder or haunches sometime, and notice how your pet melts into you, and how the expression in his eyes change. It's really quite fascinating and gratifying, and could be a form of therapy for you as well.

Some of my clients with "irreversible" physical conditions confide that the benefits of massage therapy reaches far beyond alleviating tight muscles:

- "Sam" with sciatic nerve damage indicates that although his primary pain is relentless and unchanging, having everything else released gives him greater overall flexibility, boosts his mood and self esteem and helps him feel more mentally able to cope with his pain.
- "Pete", with early onset Parkinson's echoed similar sentiments. With an easing of extreme muscle tightness, shortening and rigidity, comes relief, hope, and possibilities.
- "James" with Cerebral Palsy, confided that the only touch he receives outside of massage therapy is in receiving assistance with his activities of daily living in a wheelchair – very businesslike and efficient.

These particular individuals have obvious physical stresses, but also additional psychological stress due to living with these issues on a daily and long term basis.

Okay ... that was a HUGE subject to tackle in a newsletter! I hope it made sense and that maybe it stirs you to explore making needed changes in your life. Good luck, you can do it!