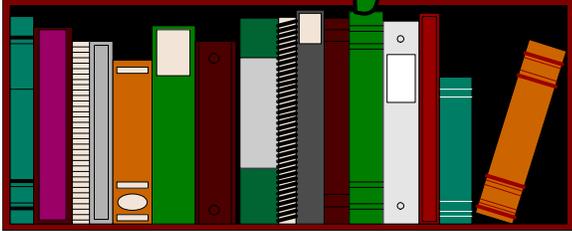


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Soothing Stress with Aromatherapy And Massage

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The textbook or Oxford Dictionary definition of stress is, “demand on physical or mental energy.” Negative or harmful stress is generally one of two types. Acute stress which is usually manifested by superficial intense stress that disappears quickly and chronic stress which is prolonged stress that lingers for no specific time period.

The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that 926,838 people lost their lives to unmanaged stress. It has become the nation's third most crippling mental and physical disease. Stress does not discriminate it affects all ages, races and genders. It is linked with multiple physical and mental ailments ranging from headaches to heart disease. It is said that “life acts and we react”. We need a certain amount of stress to function but when stress becomes overwhelming it is a negative force. Stress is very individual, one person's stress is another's stimulation. The response to stress is based on level of health, comfort, coping abilities, hormone balance and social support system.

Causes of Stress:

- Emotional stress:** Stress caused by life situations; illness, chronic health problems, divorce, death, parenting, safety issues, spiritual angst, etc.
- Mental stress:** Chronic worry over financial issues, employment, exams, feeling a certain lack of control over your life, impossible demands from others etc.
- Chemical stress:** Caffeine (coffee, soda, etc.), junk food, pollutants, synthetics and chemicals, second hand smoke, etc.
- Environmental stress:** Occupational stress related to one's job. Includes noise, working conditions, lighting, air quality, etc.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress:

- . digestive system upsets
- . heart rate and breathing increases raising blood pressure
- . oxygen is transferred from the brain and muscles (fight or flight)
- . energy is quickly released from stored fats and sugars raising blood sugar or quickly dropping it in hypoglycemia
- . muscles tense and blood vessels in the skin constrict
- . blood thickens and has a tendency to clot
- . extra adrenaline is produced
- . immune system is compromised
- . extra adrenal stress hormones are released
- . accelerates aging process
- . changes in our well being and homeostasis (eating, sleeping, exercise, work, relationships, etc.)

We have to manage stress whether real or perceived because the health effects are the same. Catastrophic events like war, hurricanes, etc. are all stressful but it is critical that we channel our stress constructively and avoid disharmony, disease and chaos. We must strive to create a balanced state in our body and mind.

Diseases often linked with Stress:

- Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Increase in bacterial infections, including strep, pneumonia, flu
- Asthma (over active airways increase with stress)
- Ulcers
- IBS
- Crohn's disease

Chronic constipation
Migraines
Headaches
Backaches
Cancer (decrease in T-cells the white blood cells that destroy cancer)
Immune Disorders
Alzheimers (increased oxidants reducing hippocampus)

Natural ways to alleviate and manage stress:

Shift in mental patterns/ guided imagery
Relaxation techniques: meditation, yoga, massage, aromatherapy
Spiritual grounding/ energy work
Forgiveness
Gratitude and optimism

Take one step to break the cycle and you can move forward.

Aromatherapy and essential oils can be an effective ally in the treatment of stress. The following oils: Roman and German chamomile (Anthem nobilis and Matricaria recutica), clary sage(Salvia sclarea) , frankincense (Boswellia carterii), geranium (Pelargonium graveolens), lavender (Lavendula angustifolia), sweet marjoram (Origanum marjorana), melissa (Melissa officinalis), rose (Rosa damascene), sandalwood (Santalum album), neroli (Citrus aurantium), bergamot (Citrus bergamia), lemon(Citrus limon), grapefruit(Citrus paradise), sweet orange (Citrus sinensis) , lime(Citrus aurantifolia) and ylang ylang (Canaga odorata) are some of the most frequently used.

Methods of use include baths, aromalamps, diffusers, aroma massage, inhalers, roll-on, bath and body products, a few drops in a handkerchief, drops in cotton balls, sprays, etc. Make it easy and convenient for you!

Why use massage and aromatherapy for alleviating stress and improving wellness?

Both of these modalities are considered Complementary Therapies and are done in conjunction with your standard medical treatment. Massage increases circulation and promotes relaxation. Recent studies have shown that massage alleviates symptoms of stress/anxiety and can also relieve nausea, insomnia, pain, fatigue and depression. (Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html69296)

Aromatherapy massage is especially well suited for health conditions which involve stress or emotional health issues. When you inhale the essential oil molecules...messages are transmitted to the limbic system of the brain. These messages affect heart rate, stress level, blood pressure, breathing, memory, digestion and the immune system. (<http://altmedicineabout.com/od/massage>)

The Journal of Clinical Nursing, pages 1695-1703 (September 2007); reported the use of aromatherapy massage with music on a group of 86 Emergency Room nurses. These modalities produced positive effects that were “immediate and dramatic.” (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007>)

Both of these ancient arts are convenient, pleasant and affordable. They can even be performed on yourself with minimal education via books or workshops. Self massage began when man first banged his arm on a solid surface. It is natural to rub painful areas on our bodies. Massage stimulates the release of powerful endorphins in the body that help ease pain. Adding essential oils to your massage will enhance the massage experience. Aromatherapy serves to relax the mind, body and spirit. Mary Atkinson, author of the book ‘A Practical Guide to Self Massage’ says, “ A simple five minute hand or foot massage can lower blood pressure, heart rate and reduce feelings of panic.” Massage the area that is being affected by your stress. Some examples for self massage are: digestion- stomach, headache- neck and shoulders, and to promote overall relaxation- forehead, face, hands and feet.

Science Daily reported in their November 5, 2007 news update that a new study at The Mayo Clinic showed that massage therapy decreases pain levels for patients after heart surgery. The program known as The Healing Enhancement Program was first proposed in October of 2005. Sue Cutshall RN is the lead author of the study and said, “ We recognize it is not enough to fix the heart, we have to treat the whole patient.” The study also recognized the value of using guided imagery, music therapy, and stress education classes. For more information see www.mayoclinic.org/medical-edge.

Both methods are safe and effective ways to help yourself, but as with anything there are certain safety precautions. Safety precautions for massage include avoiding massage if you have an infectious skin disease, rash or open wounds. *Those who are prone to blood clots or are using blood thinners should speak with their physicians before receiving a massage.* Other things to watch for are inflamed skin, unhealed wounds, tumors, hernias, or areas that were recently fractured. Aromatherapy and/or massage do not take the place of medical treatment. These complementary therapies should not be used by those with serious medical conditions without the knowledge and support of their physician.

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