

Massage .. more than just pampering.

By David Hall, Qualified Massage Therapist

Many of my clients tell me that when they mention to their friends they are going for a massage, a frequent comment is "you're lucky."

The friends assume the person is going for a relaxing massage where they will be pampered. In some cases this is true, but often it's not.

Acceptance and understanding of massage as a genuine healing therapy for stress, and muscle and joint problems has come a long way in the last 10 years. But there are still many people who assume much but really know little about massage.

Lifestyle and holiday-type TV programs now regularly feature brief segments where someone is enjoying a relaxing, pampering massage at their holiday resort or a health spa. This tends to give the impression, however, that massages are a luxury.

Pain and Relaxation.

But there are many different types of therapeutic massage, some of which can be quite painful at times but which still leave you feeling wonderfully relaxed.

If your therapist is pressing hard with fingers or pushing an elbow deep into a muscle to stretch it and release the tension, the last thing you are thinking is how "lucky" you are. Sometimes you wish you could crawl off the table!

These are known as remedial or deep tissue massages. They are designed to loosen and release tight muscles, some quite deep in the body, to help remove aches and pains in muscles and joints. You feel very relaxed at the end of a remedial massage because applying deep pressure deliberately triggers the release of endorphins and other natural muscle relaxants that flood the body. About 90 per cent of the massages I do are remedial, about 5 per cent Swedish (relaxation) and 5 per cent Manual Lymphatic Drainage (cleansing/relaxing).

But if remedial massages are sometimes painful, why do patients keep coming back and recommending them to their friends and family? It's not because the patients are masochists. The reason simply is, the massages work. Ask a massage patient who has had a good



remedial massage from a competent therapist and they will tell you it's well worth putting up with an hour or 1-1/2 hour session with occasional discomfort to have often long-standing muscular aches and pains removed.

I personally believe that if more people went to qualified remedial masseurs for, say, common back or shoulder or other muscular pain initially, rather than automatically seek medical treatment, the nation's taxpayer-funded Medicare bill could be cut by millions of dollars a year.

Massage aims to help the body heal itself - naturally. When you think about having a massage, consider what it is you need or want the massage for.

There are many different types of genuine therapeutic massage, each with different techniques to meet different needs.

Main Types.

Here's a brief overview of the main types:
Swedish (relaxation): A firm but gentle massage to relieve general stress and surface muscle tension. It does not involve deep tissue work and quickly helps the client relax, often to the point where it is possible to fall asleep on the table.

Swedish stimulates circulation of blood and lymph around the body, which helps ensure the organs and various body systems also function better, and promotes a feeling of physical and psychological wellbeing - among many other benefits.

This type of massage can be used just on specific areas (like the back of the body) if you only have, say, half an hour, but best results are obtained with full body massage.

You will feel pampered with Swedish massage.

Remedial.

Remedial (deep tissue): This type of massage is ideal for sore and aching muscles and joints and specific or general pain areas (eg. lower back, neck, shoulders, legs, arms, hands).

It releases tension in affected muscles and other not-always-obvious muscles contributing to the problem. Using a variety of techniques, including trigger point therapy, masseurs may work deep into the tissue to help muscles release and be balanced on left/right and back/front sides of the body.

Deep tissue work may cause some discomfort at the time but patients almost without exception agree the results are well worth it. Specific stretching for these muscles also may be given.

Remedial massage can be used just on specific areas or the whole body. Because more time is sometimes needed on certain areas, more than one session, or a long session, may be required if you need a full body massage.

Sports.

Sports (pre/post competition): Mainly used for preparing athletes for competition or in warming down or de-tensioning muscles after an event.

Sports masseurs are also trained to deal with many sporting injuries. Sports massage mainly concentrates on muscle groups most likely to be used in particular sports.

It involves brisk warming of these muscle groups and stretching to relax the muscles. Many of these techniques are also used in remedial massage. Sports masseurs are generally also qualified in remedial massage.

Depending on what is required, an on-site pre or post-competition sports massage may take as little as five to 15 minutes.

Lymphatic.

Manual Lymphatic Drainage - MLD (cleansing): An extremely light, gentle and relaxing massage to improve circulation and filtering of lymph fluid and help cleanse the body of toxins.

Unlike blood, which is pumped around the body by the heart "24/7," the lymphatic system relies on movement, muscle action and pressure changes to

"pump" and filter the lymph fluid through the system of lymph vessels, nodes and organs to where it re-enters the bloodstream in veins above the heart.

Lymphatic massage provides an external "pump" and helps reduce fluid build-up in various parts of the body (eg swollen feet and hands, cellulite/dimpled areas in legs and hips, or pear shaped hips), and is ideal for patients with lymphodema following cancer operations.

Lymphatics are a major part of the body's immune system, which can become sluggish. So this type of massage is also ideal for people feeling run down or lethargic or with problems like asthma, some allergic reactions (eg hay fever), migraines, constipation, and as a supplementary treatment for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or Ross River Fever.

Aromatherapy:

A relaxing massage where the various therapeutic properties of pure essential oils and herbs are used individually or in combination to achieve the desired results.

Like other forms of massage, aromatherapy has been tried and proven over thousands of years. Aromatherapy helps relax the nervous system, stimulates circulation of blood and lymph and restores the skin (a very significant part of the body's immune system).

It can also relieve a host of minor ailments including headache, insomnia, aching joints and even depression. Aromatherapy combines the health benefits of relaxation massage with the therapeutic pleasures of scent.

Caring Touch.

All these types of massages offer the magic of caring "touch." Without the stimulation and nourishment of skin contact from other humans we can suffer mentally and physically and our resistance to disease is lowered.

A competent, professional masseur will always be sensitive to his/her client's needs and feelings. The masseur will discuss various aspects or options with the particular types of massage before the treatment.

If you'd like to know more about remedial massage, call one of our qualified therapists today.