

How Massage Helps Immunity

by Margy Squires

As a touch therapy, massage promotes relaxation and healing. I interviewed Sherry Sledge, a nationally licensed massage therapist with extensive training in craniosacral, neuromuscular, rehabilitative and other forms of healing bodyworks. She is also a certified educator in mind-body medicine. She explains how massage encourages your own innate immunity defense for the winter cold and flu season as well as throughout the year.



Q What defines massage as a technique for health?

Generally speaking, massage can be considered a mechanical cleanser. It opens up blood vessels to improve circulation for improved oxygen and nutrient transport. Massage relieves congestion in the lymph system to hasten elimination of toxins and debris.

Q Is oil part of the therapy?

The oil makes manipulation easier. Typically sesame (warm, calming) or coconut (cool, nourishing) is used as a base or carrier oil of the fragrant oils (orange, eucalyptus, etc). Each herb adds its own therapeutic element such as refreshing citrus. Herbs also positively affect immunity as they possess antimicrobial, antibacterial and antifungal properties. A few drops in the carrier oil are sufficient. In fact, during World War I, medics carried lavender to treat infections in wounds and calm the soldiers as a side benefit.



Q How does massage stimulate immunity?

Research suggests massage can de-stress and therefore reduces cortisol levels that interfere with immune function. Lowering stress hormones is only part of the story. Other studies show massage increases interleukin 2 and interferon activity to improve immunity, decrease the risk for cancer, increase growth hormone for anti-aging, cell repair and recovery. These improvements can last up to three weeks.

Q Can you give us other healing benefits of massage?

Many people are shallow breathers which increases the toxic load. Massage stretches fascia (connective tissue) and breaks up adhesions and fibrous knots. It loosens joints to eliminate

harmful particles and increase mobility. Massage reduces water retention due to inflammatory edema (swelling) in lymph.

Q What about detox for immunity?

I'm trained in Pachakarma, an extensive body purification utilizing herbalized massage and heat therapies. It's designed to eliminate toxins from the mind-body physiology which includes your emotions. It is an extremely effective detox therapy and I recommend a minimum of three sessions.



Q How do I find a good therapist?

If you are looking for a specific result, whether for immunity, body mechanics, fibromyalgia or myofascial release, ask questions. Does the therapist specialize in that particular field or have additional training beyond the basics? Check with your insurance company for referrals and potential reimbursement.

Q Any final recommendations?

In less than 15 minutes a day, you can benefit from self massage. For the next 30 days, start by taking a warm shower to open skin pores. Drape a body or beach towel over the commode. Warm oil by rubbing palms together and apply to skin. Rub up and down on straight places, in a circular motion at curves. Don't forget to include head, ears, hands and feet!

Sherry Sledge is owner of Bodyworks Center for Perfect Health in Fountain Hills, AZ and a member of the Health Points Advisory Panel. She can be reached for appointments at 480-816-3900.



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