

What is new at Touching Well

After an unusual time in lock-down, I started to see clients again as soon as I was allowed to. I was so happy to see them. With my visor it felt at times as if I was looking through one of those circus mirrors, everything looks a bit distorted and misty. This, plus the face coverings, is a small price to pay for being able to treat clients safely. Now we are in the second lock-down, where I am allowed to treat clients for medical conditions.

Tips for stretches

If it feels wrong, don't do it.

Be curious.

Follow your body.

Be kind.

Stay in the moment.

Move.

Breathe.

I have spent the first lock-down putting a series of stretches together, since massage was not possible. They have now found a [permanent home](#) on the

Touching Well website, ordered by part of the body to be stretched.

In this Massage Message there is a study showing that releasing the sole of the foot can increase ankle stability. This is important not only in terms ease of movement, but also in injury and fall prevention.



Here is a way of releasing the sole of your foot (plantar fascia) on your very own stairs. "Scrape" the arch of your foot on the edge of the bottom step to ease the fascia on the sole of your foot. Do this very slowly and deliberately. Pause where you feel tenderness, and

Recent feedback

I was very lucky to get the first appointment with Regina after lock-down ended. As always she puts you at ease with her warmth and professionalism. I was totally reassured by all the extra measures in place, and the new sheets on the bed are super crisp and clean. Importantly it still felt like a usual visit and not too clinical. Regina is very flexible and whatever measures you want she can accommodate. A lovely new touch is individual towels in the toilet! Like a luxury spa. A good massage was exactly what I needed after several stressful months and it is so important at this time to take care of yourself. We are worth it!

Susan S, Mapperley, Nottingham

wait. Perhaps wriggle your toes after a little while. You can also slightly shift your weight, for example, bend your knee a little more, and thus flex your ankle. You can also do this on the outside of your foot. And of course on the other foot.

Wishing you a spring in your step,

Regina Dengler

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Seven amazing things about our sense of touch.

1. Touch is the first sense to develop

In the womb a foetus is thought to experience touch before it can hear, smell or taste. As the pregnancy progresses, twins even reach out to touch each other. After birth we know that “kangaroo care” – where the baby is held close to a caregiver’s skin – helps the baby to feel calmer and to sleep better.

Physical contact with other people can reduce the effect of stress on our bodies.

2. The skin is the body’s largest sense organ

Human skin covers a surface area of at least two square metres. Sensors in the skin allow us to experience pressure, vibration and pain as well as temperature and physical pleasure. These sensors adapt rapidly to light touch, which means that within moments of putting on our clothes, we forget that they’re touching our skin, provided they’re not itchy of course.

3. The touch of another human being can reduce stress in adults as well as babies

Research has shown that physical contact with other people can reduce the effect of stress on our bodies. In an experiment conducted in 2003 people were asked to watch a five-minute romantic video while holding hands with their partner, followed by a 20-second hug. After that they were given just two minutes to prepare a speech which was recorded and then played back to them. Tests like this are designed to be so stressful that usually the blood pressure and the heart rates of the people taking part shoot up. But holding hands and having a hug from their partner meant they only rose half as much as usual.

4. We use different kinds of nerve fibres to detect different kinds of touch

Fast nerve fibres respond when our skin is pricked or poked, relaying messages to an area of the brain called the somatosensory cortex. But in recent years, the neuroscientist Prof Francis McGlone has been studying another type of nerve fibre (known as afferent C fibres) which conducts information at around a fiftieth of the speed of the other kind.

They relay the information to a different part of the

brain called the insular cortex – an area which also processes taste and emotion. So why has this slow system developed as well as the fast one? Francis McGlone believes slow fibres are there to promote social bonding through gentle stroking of the skin.

5. Even a simple touch on the arm can convey a range of different emotions

Experiments have shown that people can convey a list of emotions to a stranger through nothing more than a touch on the arm. If their arm was stroked or pressed or squeezed, a stranger could correctly identify the emotions the person was trying to communicate up to 83% of the time, with emotions ranging from anger, fear and disgust to love, gratitude, and sympathy.

6. We have rules which permit us to touch each other more in some situations than others

Strong cultural norms tell when it’s OK to touch each other. When you see a colleague in the office you might well greet them differently from when you bump into them on a night out. And in cafés, for example, there doesn’t tend to be much interpersonal touch, while at an airport people behave rather differently. In an observational study conducted in airport departure and arrivals lounges, 60% of people touch each other physically, hugging, kissing or shaking hands.

7. In our digital age touch still matters when it comes to shopping

Although we live in a visual age where our attention is grabbed by how things look, we still care about how things feel. Despite the convenience, only 9% of shopping is done online. Is this partly because we want to touch items before we buy?

Marketing professor Joann Peck spent hours observing the way consumers behave in shops. She found a lot of individual variation in how much we touch the goods laid out in front of us. Some people just look, but others, the “high need for touch” people, are so keen to touch before they buy they tear packets open so that they can feel what’s inside.

Texture affects our purchasing decisions too. We like objects we can imagine gripping in our hands, such as the traditional glass Coke bottle or a deodorant with indentations where you hold it. (Claudia Hammond, *The Touch Test*, October 2020).

Test, October 2020).



Massage helps with depression

People with depression tend to have quite a few physical as well as psychological symptoms, in particular anhedonia. This was a new word for me, it is an inability to feel pleasure.

A German team developed a massage sequence that simulated the afferent C fibres (mentioned on p.2) incorporating slow gentle strokes (3-10 cm a second). They compared this sequence with relaxation in 57 outpatients with depression. They had four weekly sessions of either relaxation or massage. The participants were assessed with various questionnaires and an interview about the effect of the intervention. Massage had much better outcomes than the relaxation sessions. The researchers suggest that stimulating the C fibres, thought to specialise in comforting touch, could increase the ability to feel pleasure. (*Brain Sci.* 2020 Sep 26;10(10)).

Studies have shown that stroking yourself with slow gentle strokes is lovely, but it does not stimulate the afferent C fibres in the same way. If you are lacking touch by another person, exercise can be a substitute.

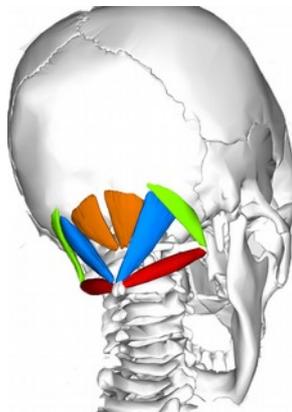
(*The science of affectionate touch (BBC, 8 Oct 2020)*).

There are quite a few studies showing that massage helps with psychological well-being, from calming anxiety to lifting depression. A recent meta-analysis showed that massage reduces anxiety and depression in pregnant women (compared with usual care). (*Midwifery.* 2020 Nov;90:102818).

Five minutes MFR on neck releases stress

A study looked at whether myofascial release (MFR) of the muscles between the first and second vertebra (suboccipital) could relieve stress. We have looked at a previous *Massage Message* (*May 2015*) at this set of four muscles and their importance in regulating head position. My osteopath mentioned that tension in this area can contribute to sleep problems (he gave a physiological explanation, but I was too relaxed to take it in).

Forty women in the clothing industry were taken away



from their work. Fifteen rested for five minutes, twenty five were given a five minute MFR session of the suboccipital muscles. The researchers looked at cortisol levels in the saliva as an indicator for stress. The cortisol levels were reduced in both groups, but much more so in the myofascial release group. This study shows two things, firstly, five minutes away from work did reduce the stress level, and secondly, as little of five minutes MFR can make a big difference. (*J*

Can Chiropr Assoc. 2020 Aug;64(2):109-118).

Massage for musicians

While music is often relaxing to listen to, playing an instrument can cause physical tension and pain for musicians, mainly in the upper body. A study looked at preventing and/or easing these problems using chair massage or exercise. Forty-four music students were divided into three groups, chair massage, exercise and control. The students in the massage and exercise groups had eight fifteen minute sessions within four weeks. All students had a questionnaire and their muscle tension was assessed using an algometer at the beginning and at regular intervals.

Health problems associated with playing an instrument was reported by 86.4% of the participants. The pain threshold decreased after each session, but more so for the massage group. From the fourth session onwards the benefits were particularly marked. Chair massage and exercise help to decrease discomfort in musicians, and significant results were seen after two weeks. (*Int J Environ*

Res Public Health. 2020 Jul 16;17(14)).

Massage lowers blood pressure

Essential or primary hypertension is raised blood pressure (higher than 140/90 mm Hg) that has no known cause. This applies to about 85% of people with raised blood pressure (BP). A study looked at how foot or back massage would influence BP and sleep quality in women with primary hypertension. 90 women were included, 30 in the control group, 30 received foot massage and 30 received back massage half an hour twice a week for three weeks. They also completed questionnaires and their BP was taken before and after each session. Massage did reduce the blood pressure and improved the quality of sleep. (*J Hum Hypertens.* 2020 Jul 16).

Foot massage for ankle instability

Many of us have sprained an ankle in the past. Isn't it unfortunate that, if it happens again, it tends to happen on the same foot? The reason could be that one ankle is less stable due to the previous injury, which could be a chronic condition. A review evaluated if massage of the sole of the foot improves ankle stability. They found three studies, and indeed, planar massage improved chronic ankle stability. The reason for this is thought to be that it improves sensation within the tissue, thus helping with the balance, and it also increases movement. (*J Sport Rehabil.* 2020 Oct 7:1-5).

There are also a couple of other recent studies showing the positive effects of foot massage: it reduces nausea, vomiting & retching on patients undergoing chemotherapy (*J Caring Sci.* 2020 Aug 18;9(3):120-124), and it decreases the pain intensity related to the change of position in unconscious trauma patients in intensive care. (*Bull Emerg Trauma.* 2020 Jul;8(3):156-162).

Aromatherapy relieves anxiety

A study of studies (meta-analysis) looked at the effect of aromatherapy on anxiety. They searched databases of scientific publications and found thirty two trials (35 scientific publications) on the subject (there were a few in previous Massage Messages). The results, taken together from these studies, showed that inhalation and massage aromatherapy significantly decreased anxiety levels in different conditions. None of the studies mentioned any side effects. (*J Affect Disord.* 2020 Sep 1;274:1028-1040).

Aromatherapy can help to decrease anxiety and help with labour pain found another recently published meta-analysis (*Ethiop J Health Sci.* 2020 May;30(3):449-458).

Recent feedback

Relaxing treatment which help with circulation in the feet and calves. I highly recommend Regina.

Mark Cartledge, Sherwood

Saw Regina on Monday for an MLD session for my Lipeodma. She was absolutely wonderful, my legs felt so much better and lighter.

What a great start to my week! 💕

Samar Ounissim, Beeston

Amazing. Waited far too late into pregnancy to find her! Could have stayed on the bed for at least another hour!

Bec Horts, Nottingham

Preventing lymphoedema after hysterectomy

Women can get lymphoedema after cancer treatment. This is true for breast cancer, where the oedema tends to be in the arm and for gynaecological cancers, where the oedema often manifests in the legs. Removal of lymph glands increases the risk of developing oedema.

A study looked at prevention of leg lymphoedema after a radical hysterectomy (removing of the womb and surrounding tissues, including the fallopian tubes, part of the vagina, ovaries, lymph glands and fatty tissue) for cancer of the cervix. One hundred and twenty women were randomly assigned to an intervention or control group (60 in each group) after their radical hysterectomy. The intervention consisted of manual lymph drainage (MLD), compression hosiery, regular exercise and health education. The women in the control group received health education only. The researchers were interested in how many women developed lymphoedema. Of the 117 women completing the study one year post surgery, 28 developed lymphoedema, 20 in the control group, 8 in the treatment group, a significant difference. Also, the lymphoedema was less severe in the women who received lymphoedema therapy throughout the year. (*Int J Gynecol Cancer.* 2020 Jun;30(6):757-763).

Leg oedema and the heart

When I see clients with heart issues and oedema in my practice, I am treating them very cautiously. The reason is that the heart might "park" fluid in the legs, otherwise it could be overwhelmed. A review looked at this cautious practice and found that some treatment for oedema (even if that oedema is caused by the heart) does not affect the heart negatively.

MLD and compression (multilayer bandaging or hosiery) with moderate strength had, if anything, only transient effect on the heart while decreasing oedema. More research is needed to find out if strong compression is also a potential treatment for people with chronic heart failure and oedema. (*ESC Heart Fail.* 2020 Oct;7(5):2012-2020).

