

## TOUCH RESEARCH & MASSAGE THERAPY.

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### I. INTRODUCTION.

The history of massage therapy is as ancient as the organized life of mankind. There is evidence that this form of touch therapy existed even in the days when mankind was nomadic. So "touch healing methodology", has been an integral part of human experience for many millennia. It is therefore a misconception that massage therapy is a new age invention of modern times. In ancient times in China, in the Arabian civilization, in the Indus valley civilization, in the Roman empire, in Greece, in North and South America, massage therapy had found application in overcoming the effects of strain and stress.[1-5]

One of the earliest recorded works was the famous Chinese text known as the "Yellow Emperor Classic" which describes the type of body manipulative work now identified as massage or touch therapy. Similar skills were recorded in the ancient Ayurvedic texts of India. The Chinese *Ah Shi Points* closely resembles present-day neuromuscular therapy (NMT), but predates this by thousands of years. The early physicians of the western world, such as Hippocrates, Galen, and later, Ambroise Pare, employed the techniques of massage therapy in their curative work. Evidence of sophisticated massage techniques is also found in the Egyptian scrolls, which depict methods of deep tissue bodywork. The techniques of massage had gained immense popularity in the middle ages and in 1363 Guy de Chaulic published a book about surgery wherein was described

different body manipulations. Paracelsus (see page 6) found these techniques valuable and essential in therapy.

In the nineteenth century the techniques now identified as Swedish massage were founded by Henrik Ling a doctor and a gymnastic coach, who cured himself of rheumatism and then founded the Royal Gymnastic Central Institute in Stockholm. Ling drew much from the techniques used in China, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. He also established a Society of trained masseurs in 1894.

Today massage therapy is universally practiced in every type of medical system, and there is much ongoing research (Touch Research) that has now placed this ancient art on a scientific basis. For a time, the unsavory image created by "massage parlours" seemed to eclipse the actual value of the technique but scientific intervention has placed massage therapy once again on a firm basis as an integral part of healthcare practice. [1-5]

### II. WHAT IS MASSAGE THERAPY?

Let us briefly consider the present concepts of what is called Massage Therapy or MT. The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) defines massage as follows:[6]

**"Massage is a manual soft tissue manipulation that includes holding, causing movement, and/or applying pressure to the body"**

And massage therapy is defined as:[6]

**"A profession / practice in which the practitioner applies manual techniques, and may apply adjunctive therapies with the intention of positively effecting the health and wellbeing of the client."**

Massage is therefore an old art gaining stature in the medical establishment on account of the expansion in understanding its scientific basis. From the Chinese methods that were described in the Yellow Emperor Classic some basic concepts of massage therapy came to be accepted in accordance with extensive practice. Some of the



Chinese methodology came also to be incorporated in the systems that prevailed elsewhere. In Egypt in 2300 BC within the tomb of Akhmahor are depicted figures that convey the techniques of massage therapy at the time. These have come to be incorporated in Asian systems, and in particular within the Ayurvedic system. There undoubtedly were similar systems handed down from the Vedic practices which were the beginnings of Ayurveda and this made it easy to incorporate similar techniques prevalent during these times. "Rubbing" is extensively recommended in Ayurvedic texts for cures of various diseases such as arthritic conditions. In Asian massage therapy there developed a theory that energy flows along specific lines along the body, and it is believed that this is the basis of what is now identified as the "Thai Massage System" In 400 BC Hyppocrates used the technique of "rubbing" to improve joint functioning and muscle tone, and records show the strokes were in the direction of the heart.[3]

In medieval times in Europe massage was frowned upon and discouraged. Churchgoers in Europe were told that it was a form of the work of the devil. After 1500 when the French physician Ambroise advocated massage, and Paracelsus used it to improve the circulation in the body that it came to be reinstated.

It was the Dutch practitioner Johan Georg Mezger who is credited with having developed the four canonical strokes now identified as Swedish massage.[4]. Presently various modifications of massage are recognized in Europe and the United States.

### III. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MASSAGE THERAPY?

Massage therapy comes in many forms. [7]. It is said to improve the functioning of the circulatory, lymphatic, muscular, skeletal and nervous systems of the body. There is the Swedish mas-



sage, the Pressure Point Therapy, Thai and Japanese Variations, Ayurvedic massage which employs a variety of herbal oils and herbal baths in conjunction with manipulative massage therapy. Most common of all this day is the Sports massage which focuses on the muscle groups that are most relevant to the particular sport. Modern scientific intervention has identified the following beneficial effects of massage therapy.[7,-10]

- Reduction of muscle tension.  
Massage therapy affects all the muscles of the body as well as the soft tissues. It renders taut muscles loose, and can stimulate flaccid muscles. Muscle tension can cause restriction of blood circulation and movement of lymph.
- Improvement of blood circulation.  
The oxygen capacity of the blood is known to increase after massage therapy. By stimulating nerves that control internal organs, blood vessels of these organs dilate and permit a greater flow of blood to them.
- Induction of better lymph movement.  
Lymph is the fluid that drains waste products such as toxins from the tissue cells, and massage stimulates such detoxification.
- Enhancing the mobility of joints.  
By exercising a gentle stretching action on muscles and surrounding tissues these are maintained elastic.
- Soothing of the nervous system.  
Massage has a soothing and a calming effect on the nervous system
- Improving the digestive function.  
Massage, in addition to the above has a stimulating effect on the digestive system, by increasing its secretions and metabolic rates.
- Enhancing skin condition.  
Massage enhances the functions of the sebaceous and sweat glands, improving the skin condition.

Besides the above, massage therapy is known also to have subsidiary benefits such as these :- Benefits of the internal organs, the immune system, reduction of stress, promoting and enabling relaxation.

### IV. WHEN IS MASSAGE THERAPY BEST EMPLOYED ?

Modern massage therapists postulate that there are several identifiable conditions or "dysfunctions" that respond to clinically directed massage therapy. These dysfunctions are listed as follows:[7]

#### (a) Fascial Plane Dysfunction..

The human body is covered with a continuous layer of connective tissue that surrounds every muscle, organ, and bone and this is called the fascia or fascial sheathes. All major blood vessels and nerves follow these fascial sheathes, through the body. Properly aligned and released, fascia are crucial to good health notably the operation of the circulatory and nervous systems. Injury, postural patterns, chemical imbalances can cause dysfunction in respect of the fascia. Massage therapy can correct any ailments connected with such dysfunction.

#### (b) Myo-fascial Pain and Dysfunction.

Many symptoms such as headache, nausea, migraine, urinary infrequency, deafness, blurred vision can often be associated with this dysfunction. Scientists have developed extensive maps where points have been identified, from which these symptoms originate.. These are known as trigger points and are within muscles and their fascial tissues. Massage Therapy can alleviate the symptoms and give relief.



#### (c) Neuromuscular dysfunction.

Muscular activity requires that nerve impulses are dispatched to the muscle to be activated as well as to all adjoining and associated muscles. The nervous activity and muscular response is coordinated. The more complex the muscular activity is, there is a proportionate complexity in coordination. In reality the coordination can break down causing muscle fibers and whole muscles to lock in opposition to their natural activity.

This can cause neuromuscular stress and pain, which can be addressed by MT.

#### (d) Dysfunction of the Tonus system.

When muscles are overused they may tend to remain taut instead of relaxing. In this condition they tend to harbor myofascial trigger points and give rise to pain and stress on muscles and joints. This condition too can be addressed by MT.

#### (e) Dermatonic and Spondylogenic Dysfunction.

If a nerve is constricted at the point it leaves the spine or along its route, there will be pain. An example of this is the frequently occurring ailment known as sciatica, when the effected nerve is the sciatic nerve. When the joints of the spine are compressed or otherwise impaired they can cause another type of pain - spondylogenic pain.

Both these conditions can be treated by MT by loosening the muscles and other soft tissue that surrounds the area of the joint and nerve.

### V. MASSAGE THERAPY, TOUCH RESEARCH AND MODERN HEALTHCARE

Massage therapy has been ongoing for several millennia, and the practice must indeed have had substantial benefits to survive to this day. Furthermore research in modern times has fortified these benefits and developed on them. It is recorded that [11] anxiety and respiratory rates of a group of medical students at the New Jersey Medical School were diminished after MT prior to an examination. Cancer patients at the James Cancer Hospital and Research Institute, were found to be better able to bear pain and suffer less from anxiety after MT. A Study at the University of Carolina revealed that those who had suffered a recent bereavement were less depressed following MT. At the University of Miami, School of Medicine scientists of the Touch Research Institute have found that MT was helpful in decreasing the blood pressure in people with hypertension, alleviating pain in migraine sufferers, and improving productivity among office workers.

**The Touch Research Institute is a uniquely new organization founded in 1992, by Dr Tiffany Field. It is the world's first institution devoted to the scientific study of Touch and its effects on health. The TRI has conducted a series of studies pertaining to its subject area of interest. These are extensively reviewed in the institute's publications as well as in various related scientific journals. [11,12].**

The TRI has studied the impact of MT on various age groups from infants to the elderly, and for a series of conditions as varied as rheumatoid arthritis to anxiety syndromes and debilitating and terminal diseases. In all cases the scientific evidence is unmistakably clear in that MT makes a measurable positive difference to the health as well as quality of life.

The findings may be condensed in summary as follows :-

- Regular MT tends to decrease levels of the stress hormone – cortisol. Massage is believed to stimulate the vagus, (one of the twelve cranial nerves in the brain, which in turn slows down the production of cortisol).
- Several resulting advantages are stated as:
  - a. deeper sleep
  - b. reduction in risks of stress related disease
  - c. improved immune function
  - d. increased resistance to disease.
  - e. Improved lymphatic function
- A midweek massage generates a surge of mood-enhancing serotonin. (TRI scientists believe that the body naturally produces serotonin in the state of complete relaxation.)
- Regular MT keeps the spine supple and thus prevents possible vertebrae fusion.

**A large number of studies have been devoted by TRI scientists to the benefits of Aromatherapy combined with MT.[12]**

This is now emerging as a vast area of complementary medicine given the proven efficacy of Aromatherapy itself. The use of aromatic essential oils, incorporated into massage oils with an inert fixed oil medium, is one of the re-discovered practices now known as **Aromatherapy massage**.

TRI scientists have demonstrated the use of such therapy to combat mental as well as physical stress conditions. The methodology has also been used to control and manage the craving syndrome as for example in controlling smoking.

Many are the benefits of massage therapy as revealed in the extensive researches conducted on rigorous scientific lines by the researchers at the TRI.[11]

## VI. TRADITIONAL AYURVEDIC MASSAGE THERAPY

Massage therapy, as observed heretofore is indeed no new art. It was part of ancient Ayurvedic practice, and an integral part of essential therapy. [1-3]. The traditional practice maintained that massage was a daily family health ritual where family members administered therapy on other members. Massage was believed to also serve as an exercise for the practitioner and a form of essential relaxation.

It is recorded, that massage had the effect of:-

- Stimulating and toning the muscles.
- Restoring agility and facile movement to joints.
- Reducing symptoms of premature ageing
- Improving the texture of the skin.
- Retaining body shape and elasticity
- Strengthening nerves and the immune system.

In addition to the above effects massage therapy, which was always associated with the use of herbs and their essential oils, enhances the effect of these oils and their relaxant effect. There are various types of massage therapy recognized in the Ayurvedic system. In one of them the healing benefits are outlined as:[1-3 ,]

- *Jarachar* - removal of manifestations of old age
- *Saran Har* - minimizing effects of fatigue
- *Vata har* - removal of wind related ailments
- *Oreshiti Prasad kar* - improvement of sight
- *Pushti kar* - improvement of physical strength
- *Ayu kar* - longevity
- *Swapn kar* - inducing regular sleep
- *Twk drith kar* - improvement of skin
- *Klesh sahatwa* - enhances disease resistance
- *Abhigat sahatwa* - promotes healing of injuries
- *Kapha vata nirothak* - control of ailments caused by wind and mucous
- *Mriya barn bal prad* - enhances skin condition

Ayurvedic massage recognizes the role of three circulatory systems of the human body which respond to massage therapy (MT).

These are the Blood Vascular System, (BVS), the Nervous System (NS) and the Lymphatic System, (LS). The LS is the one most directly involved in massage therapy (MT). MT stimulates the lymph flow. The heat generated by the rubbing and the application of oils helps to cleanse and vitalize the body and retards the build-up of toxins. **Lymphatic Massage is an old Indian massage technique which employs essential oils in a medium of fixed oils such as mustard seed oil and almond oil. It is a precise gentle type of massage therapy which focuses on the lymphatic pathways of the body.**

In general massage therapy is recognized as being ideal for older people whose bodies are slow to replenish vital fluids lost in daily movement or exercise, and are therefore unable to counter the strain imposed on muscles and tendons.

#### VII. SOME CAUTIONARY MEASURES.

This brief general review of massage therapy and the connected aromatherapy massage will not be complete without reference to some safety factors, contra-indications and precautions. It is well recognized by Ayurvedic practitioners, who practiced the art in ancient times, as well as by modern Touch Research Scientists that, massage must not be recommended in cases of certain medical conditions. This applies in cases following major surgery, cardiovascular ailments, and heart diseases, especially such conditions as high blood pressure, thrombosis, phlebitis, and undiagnosed oedemas.. **Therefore MT must be conducted after a physical check-up and under the supervision of qualified practitioners.** There are some obvious precautions too. Massage should never be carried out on infected skin conditions, burns, warts, or boils. Varicose veins too must never be massaged. Massage over the abdomen in the case of pregnant women must be carried out under medical care. In the case of cancer patients specially trained personnel must carry out the massage therapy. There is now specialized training for MT as applicable to different disease syndromes. Touch Research is now a major discipline.

**The above precautionary measures notwithstanding, massage therapy, particularly when allied to Aromatherapy is a powerful old weapon that has been rediscovered, and now revisited, and thereby vastly improved with**

**the intervention of modern scientific inputs.[12].**

**For humankind it is another means, simple and natural, of combating disease, poor health, the deficiencies caused by the ageing process, and above all a means towards ensuring a better quality of life.**



#### VIII. REFERENCES.

##### FURTHER INFORMATION

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