

Mind and body: the healing power of touch

BY GAZETTE STAFF

From the everyday person to the professional athlete, massage can play an integral role in the physical and emotional well-being of a person.

Massage therapy can alleviate the discomfort of many ailments such as neck and back pain, stress, headaches, tendonitis and the discomforts associated with pregnancy. Professional massage can also aid recovery from severe physical injuries.

It can also assist in the aches and pains caused by athletics. Participating in any physical activity subjects our muscles to small injuries called micro-traumas. The body heals micro-traumas in the tendons, muscles and ligaments by generating a connective tissue protein called collagen. Massage aids the healing process by breaking up excess collagen between healthy muscle fibres. This increases circulation and allows the body to flush out lactic acid and other toxins faster.

Receiving a massage before a competition helps athletes warm up. This enhances performance and prevents injuries during the event. Athletes can speed the recovery

process with a post-competition massage.

Alan Miller, a recreational runner, says massage therapy makes it easier for his muscles to recover after a

run.

"I can really notice a difference when I get a massage after running...it feels great. When I don't, it takes a bit longer to get the tightness out of the legs."

Today, more people are

becoming aware of alternative health care methods. People are keeping their bodies in shape

through exercise, diet and relaxation. People are also actively attempting to reduce mental, physical and emotional

stress. This has led to recognition of massage as an effective tool in an ever-expanding array of health care techniques. Massage is establishing credibility through

receive education in the areas of anatomy, physiology, pathology, kinesiology, hydrotherapy and the treatment of medically-related conditions. During their training students receive extensive clinical experience. After registering with a provincial governing body, therapists must display their registration number on each receipt they issue.

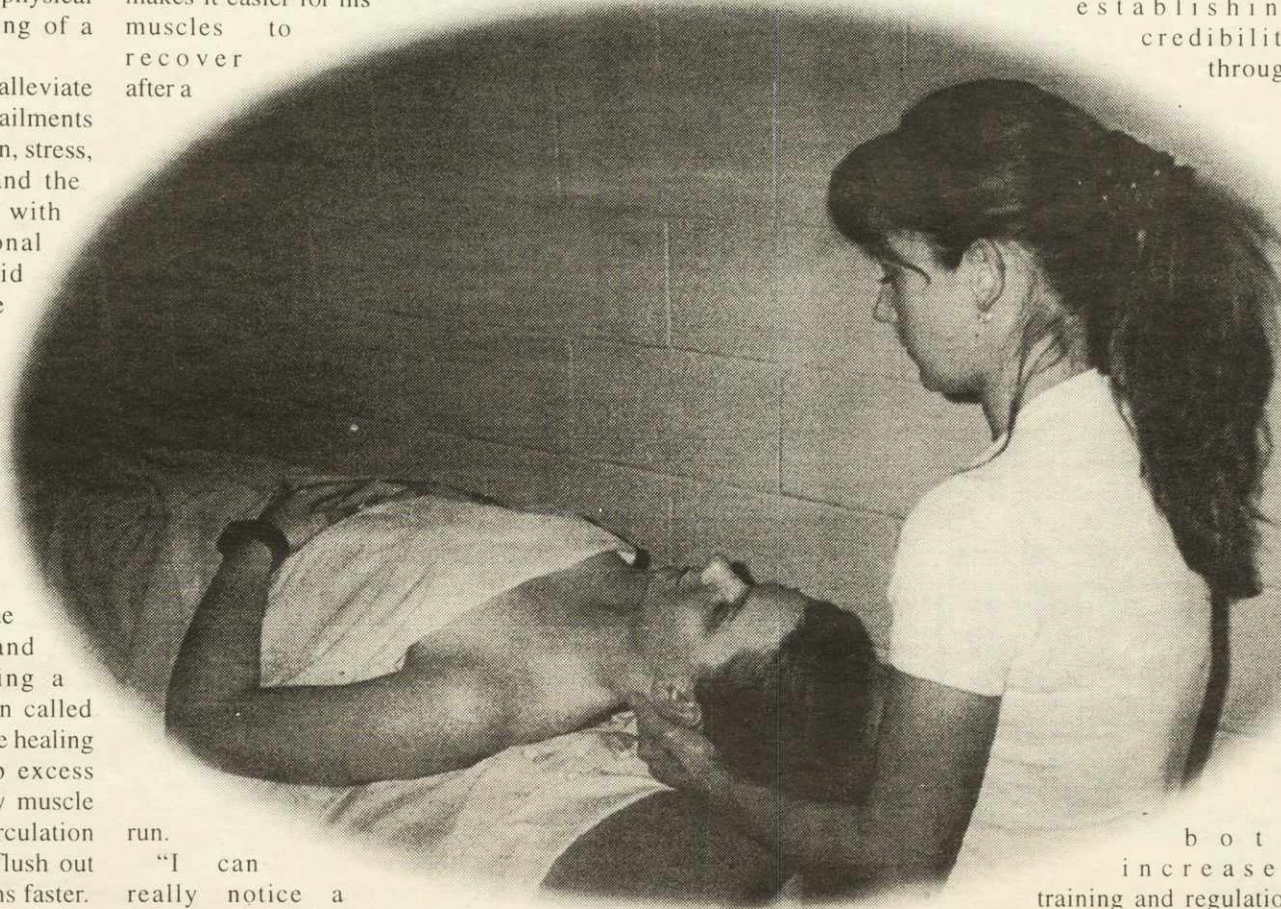
Patricia Ward is a registered massage therapist working in Halifax. She says her work is very rewarding.

"What I enjoy the most about massage therapy is helping people reach their goals, such as getting people back to daily activities after traumatic injury," says Ward.

Depending upon where you go, massages can be affordable for students. The average cost of massage treatment in metro Halifax is \$60 per hour or \$35 for a half-hour appointment, and many of these clinics offer student discounts.

A doctor's referral is often required to receive treatment of injuries.

In many of these cases insurance companies will cover the cost of the treatment.



both increased training and regulation of therapists.

Massage therapists are required to complete a minimum of 2200 hours of training in a government-approved school of massage. They

Basic massage techniques

Massage was first documented in China before being popularized by the Greeks and Romans, who incorporated massage into their health care regime. In Europe however, it was not well received during the Middle Ages to the 16th century because of societal taboos — often massage was inaccurately portrayed as a sexual act. In the East, massage, acupuncture, acupressure and shiatsu were valued for their healing properties.

All styles of massage use one or more of the following techniques:

A Swedish massage incorporates effleurage — which uses the finger and the flat of the hand in long, gliding strokes directed toward the heart combined with kneading and friction on the surface of the muscle — with assisted movement of the joints. It relaxes the mind and body, warms up and flushes toxins out of the muscles and improves circulation and range of motion.

Deep tissue massage uses slow strokes and deep hand pressure on tight areas, either following or going against the grain of the muscle. It releases tension and restores suppleness and length.

Trigger-point therapy applies concentrated finger pressure on specific "trigger points" to break the cycle of spasm and pain. Trigger points are small sensitive areas in the muscle fibres that develop under extreme physical stress. They are commonly found in the lower back, neck and shoulders.

Shiatsu is massage blended with acupressure. Pressure is applied to special points along meridians, the invisible channels of energy flow in the body. Shiatsu is short for the Japanese term of shiatsuryoho: "shi" meaning finger and "atsu" meaning pressure.

Sports massage techniques are designed to benefit muscles by warming and softening tissues, realigning muscle fibres, breaking down scar tissue and flushing toxins from muscles. Sports massage helps to speed recovery from hard workouts and competition and enhance performance.

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