

The Healing and Strengthening Power of Touch

by www.SixWise.com

The power of touch is displayed perhaps no more poignantly than during the first few months of life. Babies who are not hugged and held during these first months will not thrive and grow like their cuddled peers. In fact, a study by Rush University Medical Center in Chicago found that infants, who were held, snuggled and touched had better mental and motor skills than those who were not.

Physical touch is so important that the Medical Center actively recruits volunteer "cuddlers" to help give the up to 700 critically ill newborns in their care each year regular hugs and snuggles.

"We know the importance of tactile stimulation to an infant's overall health and well-being," Dr. Robert Kimura, chair of neonatology, told the Los Angeles Times. "These folks are invaluable members of the healthcare team."

But we need physical touch not only as babies; we also need it as adults. Studies have shown that therapeutic touch benefits adults in the following ways:

- Reduces stress (touching releases two feel-good brain chemicals, serotonin and dopamine)
- Lessens pain
- Reduces symptoms of Alzheimer's disease such as restlessness, pacing, vocalization, searching and tapping

One study even found that women's anxiety about potentially receiving a mild electric shock diminished significantly when they touched their husband's hand, and also lessened to some degree by touching a stranger's hand.

Touch is a Powerful Form of Communication, Stress Relief

A pat on the arm or a high-five can sometimes express far more than words. According to Dacher Keltner, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, touch is actually "our richest means of emotional expression."



Holding hands with your spouse can make your stress melt away almost instantly. SixWise Founder John Dearlove and his wife have made it a policy to always hold hands when disagreeing or arguing, which for them has consistently brought each into touch with the other.

"Holding hands has greatly diminished the intensity of what would have been more stressful moments," John says. "It's difficult, if not impossible, for either of us to be or stay mad when we are holding hands looking directly into each other's eyes, which promotes truth, love, care, respect and consideration for one another."

Compassion prevails when truly literally in-touch.



As the New York Times recently reported, even brief episodes of touch can communicate a wide variety of powerful emotions, emotions that have a significant impact on other people. For instance:

- Students whose teacher gave them a supportive touch on the back or arm were nearly twice as likely to volunteer in class.
- A sympathetic touch from a doctor gives patients the impression that their appointment lasted twice as long.
- A massage from a loved one can ease pain and depression while strengthening your relationship.

Research by psychologist Dr. Karen Grewen also found that hugging and handholding reduces the effects of stress. Two groups of couples were asked to talk about an angry event, but one group had previously held hands and hugged, while the others sat alone. It was found that:

- Blood pressure increased significantly more among the no-contact group as compared to the huggers.
- Heart rate among those without contact increased 10 beats a minute, compared to five beats a minute for huggers.

What's more, Grewen suggests that warm contact such as hugs and handholding before the start of a rough day "could carry over and protect you throughout the day."

What are Some Ways to Benefit from Touch?

One of the simplest ways is to hold hands with your spouse, [hug your friend or neighbor](#), and be generous with pats on the back, high-fives, fist bumps and other forms of physical communication.

You can also [get a massage](#), either from a loved one or a professional massage therapist. Massage therapy decreases stress hormones in your body and, according to the Touch Research Institute:

- Facilitates weight gain in preterm infants
- Enhances attentiveness
- Alleviates depressive symptoms
- Reduces pain
- Reduces stress hormones
- Improves immune function



Getting regular massages is a simple way to take advantage of the healing power of touch.



If you're giving or getting a massage at home, [Surgeon's Skin Secret Moisturizing Sticks](#) make a great, non-greasy massage oil that are completely natural (they contain only beeswax, lanolin and light mineral oil) and come in seven delectable scents.

Staying "in Touch" Mentally is Important Too

Physical touch is incredibly important, but it's also beneficial to stay mentally in touch with those around you as well. So often we remain isolated, even as we're surrounded by countless people each day. Reaching out with a smile, friendly hello and deeper, meaningful conversations will add much fulfillment to your life.

If you find it difficult to stay in touch with those around you, including your friends and family, don't be hesitant to take advantage of technology. You use Skype to reconnect with loved ones all over the world, for instance, or send photos back and forth to share even while you're apart.

And while you're together, engage in meaningful activities that can strengthen your emotional bond while enhancing your health as well, such as taking walks and exercising together. It's so simple to pop in a [SheaNetics DVD](#) or [Stretching Toward a Healthier Life DVD](#), then spend time together with your loved ones while getting in a workout.

Also take advantage of meal times, rides in the car, even trips to the grocery store to catch up and share the little details of your day with one another. You may also benefit immensely by setting aside time each week specifically to chat with your significant other.

As Dr. Peter Reznik, a mind/body integrative therapist and creator of the highly praised [How to Stay Healthy in a Stressful World CD](#), states:

"One of the ways to [help your romantic relationship thrive](#) is to have regular "state of the union" dialogues. That is, once a week create a special time (it may be only 10-15 minutes), during which you sit in front of each other and ask questions like "Where are we as a couple?" and "Has there being anything that we must discuss?"

If one or both of the partners has grievances the other is not to explain why they did what they did, unless they are specifically asked, but to say, "I am sorry this {whatever the problem is} made you feel uncomfortable, what can I do to make things better for you?"

A "state of the union" discussion will be most fruitful when sharing statements are used, as opposed to accusations."

You can adjust this exercise to use with your children, parents, siblings and close friends as well, and use it regularly to stay in touch with those around you.

Ideally, you'll embrace a combination of physical touch and mental closeness with those in your life. This will lead to more fulfilling relationships and closeness in your personal ties that makes life worth living!



SixWise Says ...

French couples spend three times more time touching than American couples. So what are we waiting for? Grab your partner, friend or family member and give them a big hug today ... tomorrow ... and even twice or more a day or more!

Of course we are also advocates of holding hands in public, known by many as PDA (Public Display of Affection) -- especially those married for 10 years or more.

Go for it ... and Enjoy Life that Much More ... Every Day!

[Pass It On! Because YOU Know Loved-ones Who Will Love and Appreciate This Article!](#)

Recommended Reading

[How Hugs are Proven to Help Your Health: Have You Been Hugged Today?](#)

[The Amazing Benefits of Massage and Different Types of Massage Explained](#)

Sources

[Los Angeles Times July 19, 2009](#)

[WebMD.com](#)

[NYTimes.com February 22, 2010](#)

[USAToday.com March 10, 2003](#)

[Touch Research Institute](#)

Jim Fazio, LMT, CSI, UTP
321~456~5051
jfhands@aol.com



Integrative Bodywork, Inc
4083 South US Highway 1, Suite 102, Rockledge, Florida 32955
www.jimfazioib.com

Copyright © Integrative Bodywork, Inc

Ralph de St. Aubin, RN
407~878~2350
healthbyralph@gmail.com