

# A Joyful Awakening

Summer 2007

Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## Expecting Moms Embrace Massage

### Pregnancy Massage Contributes to Nine Healthy Months

Hope Bentley

During pregnancy physical and emotional changes cascade throughout the body. Nausea, fatigue, swelling, heartburn, headache, and emotional turbulence are just some of the symptoms that come with the territory. Fortunately, massage can help ease these issues, so that the mom-to-be can focus on what's most important: her baby.

#### The First Trimester

"In the first trimester I see a lot of cases of nerves," says Megan O'Connor, a New York-based certified prenatal massage therapist. "Massage can give reassurance." This is largely because newly pregnant women may experience a range of emotions--elation, anxiety,

founder of Niara Healing Arts Massage Therapy and Perinatal Support Systems, "It is absolutely safe and can be very beneficial for an expecting mother."

Having said that, there are some precautions to take when considering prenatal massage. If it is a high-risk pregnancy or there's a history of complications--diabetes, high blood pressure, miscarriages, placenta previa, preeclampsia, or any other medical condition--a midwife or doctor should be consulted before scheduling a massage. In addition, it is very important for pregnant clients to speak openly with their massage therapist about any concerns or issues.



Massage can help contribute to a healthy pregnancy--and a healthy baby.

contentment, and even fear--made more poignant by the hormonal changes that accompany pregnancy. Fortunately, massage therapy can help ground an expecting mother and ease the emotional roller coaster that comes with pregnancy.

But is massage safe in the first trimester? According to Susanrachel Condon,

On the other hand, bodywork techniques like shiatsu access the meridians used in acupuncture, including trigger points that can relieve nausea. According to O'Connor, a good therapist will also teach a mother-to-be how to activate the trigger points herself, as most nausea treatments are more

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*We must be the change we wish to see in this world.*

-Mahatma Gandhi

#### Office Hours and Contact

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effective when applied at least three times a day. Techniques such as this can be a great relief to a woman navigating the early days of pregnancy.

## The Second Trimester

A woman in her second trimester may begin to have trouble with circulation, sometimes because the baby's weight begins to pinch the major veins in the mother's legs. Poor circulation can cause swelling of the extremities, headaches, and exacerbated carpal tunnel syndrome. Massage will increase circulation and help create space in the body to relieve the pressure from the baby's weight. Condon explains that weight gain and joint laxity can cause women to feel off balance and clumsy. Massage can relax the muscles around the joints and ground and balance a pregnant woman.

## The Third Trimester

As the baby grows heavy in the final trimester of pregnancy, major changes are likely to occur in the musculoskeletal system, and massage can become even more essential.

"A lot of women feel discomfort in their lower backs because the womb is moored to the sacrum, which is that triangle of area at the base of the spine," O'Connor says. "The weight of the womb pulls on that mooring and can be very uncomfortable."

Women may also experience discomfort in their abdomen. As the baby grows, the mother's muscles are stretched, her organs are compacted, and her lungs are compressed. Massage can minimize or prevent abdominal muscle tear, a complication that happens with some women. A practitioner can also help reposition the baby to alleviate discomfort and ease breathing.

And when labor finally begins, massage can help facilitate the birth, perhaps especially appealing for women considering natural childbirth.

## On the Table

But how exactly does a pregnant woman--complete with enormous tummy and tender chest--receive a massage? Many prenatal massages are given with the pregnant woman on her side, semi-reclined, briefly on her back,

or on a specially designed pregnancy massage table, and often with a network of pillows for support.

Condon explains that prenatal massage is not simply a regular massage except in a different position. A qualified prenatal massage therapist will know the changing physiognomy of a pregnant woman and will tailor the massage to the needs of the client.

## Postpartum Massage

Now that baby is here, mom needs a massage more than ever. Says O'Connor, "I think postpartum massage is extremely underrated."

After baby arrives, bodywork can help a new mother ease back into her body again, relax sore muscles, address any abdominal muscle strains or tears that occurred during pregnancy, and cope with the life changes and lack of sleep

that come with a new baby. In addition, the uterus will sometimes linger low in the abdomen instead of returning to its proper place. A Maya abdominal massage therapist can help restore the uterus to its proper position.

Nursing moms may feel reluctant to book a massage due to leaking breasts, but O'Connor says not to worry. "Women shouldn't be concerned about massage while they're nursing, even if they feel like an uncapped fire hydrant!" she says. Practitioners will accommodate nursing women, with proper draping and towels.

Pregnancy is an important time that needs to be honored, and prenatal massage plays an important role. As the body goes through miraculous changes, bodywork facilitates pregnancy and helps the expectant mother stay comfortable, connected, and healthy.



Prenatal massage can greatly benefit an expecting mother throughout her pregnancy.

# Nature's Nutritional Wonder

## Cruciferous Vegetables

Cruciferous vegetables are powerful foods that can help prevent many forms of cancer, reduce existing cancer tumors, and aid in the prevention of heart disease. Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, arugula, kale, and Brussels sprouts all contain isothiocyanates--a group of chemicals that break down carcinogens in the body, helping to metabolize toxins. Studies show that people who eat two to three servings of cruciferous vegetables each week lower their risk of breast cancer, colon cancer, and lung cancer. A National Cancer Institute study found that eating three helpings of crucifers a week dropped prostate cancer risk by 50 percent. The powerful chemicals in these veggies also reduce homocysteine levels, a known precursor to heart disease.

Cruciferous vegetables are low in calories and high in fiber and the chromium found in these foods helps regulate blood sugar and insulin function, key factors in keeping diabetes at bay. Even with all the benefits that crucifers provide, many people refuse to

eat them because of their strong taste. But a little creativity can go a long way in making these wonderful foods palatable: try cream of broccoli soup, cauliflower au gratin, stuffed cabbage, or the recipe below--the possibilities are endless.

### BRUSSELS SPROUTS FOR THE MEAT-AND-POTATOES EATER

*1 pound fresh Brussels sprouts, washed, stems trimmed, and outer leaves removed*  
*1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil*  
*2 tablespoons unsalted butter*  
*3 tablespoons cider vinegar*  
*1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese*  
*Salt and pepper, to taste*

Thinly slice Brussels sprouts, either in a food processor fitted with a slicing blade, or by hand. Heat a heavy, nonstick skillet. Add olive oil and butter, swirling the pan so that the butter melts. Saute sliced Brussels sprouts for 5 minutes. Add cider vinegar and grated Parmesan, stirring briefly to incorporate. Add salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serves four--who will all be healthier for it!



Cruciferous veggies help ward off disease.

# Massage for Seniors

## Bodywork Improves Quality of Life

Almost 35 million Americans are age 65 or older, and about 2,000 more reach this age every day. As the U.S. demographic shifts to an older population, it's important to find ways of helping our elders maintain their health and vitality. Massage for seniors is gaining importance as an alternative therapy to increase quality of life, and many massage therapists are getting special training to better serve this growing population.

### SENIORS' SPECIAL NEEDS

While similar in technique to other forms of massage, geriatric massage considers the special needs of the elderly. The specialty trained practitioner knows about positioning for greatest comfort and will often have

the client rest in the same position for the entire massage. Mobility challenges may dictate the massage be done in a bed or wheelchair. The therapist may also work both sides of the body at the same time to enhance body awareness, or only work hands and feet, if the client prefers. Sessions may be limited to 30 to 45 minutes, as older clients often do better with shorter, more frequent, massages.

The geriatric massage therapist is aware of health issues associated with aging and how to safely work with this type of client and with associated physicians. Consequently, the practitioner is able to individualize the massage service based on the client's health, mobility, and comfort level.

### BENEFITS OF GERIATRIC MASSAGE

A recent study conducted at the Weaver's Tale Retreat Center in Oregon looked at the effects of massage for elderly clients. The results of the two-year study showed that participants experienced a decrease in breathing rate of 50 percent and an improvement in range of motion, posture, body awareness, skin color, and muscle tone. Furthermore, it is well documented that caring touch benefits emotional well-being in seniors -- a population at greater risk of suffering from depression.

Massage therapy can add to the quality of a senior's life, both physically and emotionally. Consider booking a session for someone you love, and make a difference in their life.

*Kindness in  
words creates  
confidence.  
Kindness in  
thinking creates  
profoundness.  
Kindness in  
giving creates  
love.*

-Lao-Tzu

## EMBRACING TIME FOR YOURSELF THIS SUMMER

Has this summer turned out especially busy and kept you from focusing on what is important for your personal growth and health? Have you had difficulty managing everyday responsibilities and attention to your loved ones, because you feel tired and stretched out in too many directions?

You can still arrange time for revitalization with one quick call to A Joyful Awakening. A session of massage or polarity therapy is a wonderful way to slow down, get relief from muscular strain, restore the body, experience stillness, and calm the mind. Reclaim this moment for yourself and allow me to support you in awakening to the joy of feeling great!

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