

Human Touch Therapies Newsletter

August 2008

Human Touch Therapies - The Holistic Approach

In Focus: Chronic Stress & Massage

Our autonomic nervous system, which controls our body's automatic functions like heart beat and digestion, consists of two branches: the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). The brain controls these branches, switching between the two all the time.

The SNS is activated when we face excitement, a threat, or a challenge. Our body gears up for "fight or flight": we start breathing quicker to get more oxygen into the blood, our heart rate and blood pressure go up to transport more blood to the muscles, our muscles tense to be ready for action, and our adrenal glands pour adrenaline into the bloodstream to reinforce and maintain this SNS activity. Our digestive system slows down, to conserve energy. And sometimes there can be an evacuation of the contents first!

At the same time our brain also activates a chemical response: stress hormones, the main one being cortisol, are produced. These help release more energy, and suppress any inflammatory and allergic responses.

This "acute stress response" stems from primitive times: when we encountered a bear, we had to be able to fight it or flee. The cortisol ensured we could even do this with a sprained ankle. Nowadays of course we don't face bears very often anymore. But the SNS and the chemical response are also activated when our manager announces redundancies at work, or our spouse suddenly tells us they want a divorce.

When the stressor is removed, our brain switches to the PNS branch. This is the part of the nervous system involved in the normal, relaxed working of our body's systems. When the PNS switches on, the SNS is switched off. Our heart rate and blood pressure drop again, our breathing becomes slow and deep, our circulation returns to normal, our muscles relax, and our digestion starts up again. This is the state of rest and repair.

The stress response originally designed for short duration, to escape from or deal with an acute external situation (physically). However in our day and age, chronic (psychological or emotional) stress is becoming more and more common. Financial problems, a long-term illness in the family, or an unsatisfying job can all be causes of chronic stress.

During chronic stress, the brain can't switch to PNS activity anymore, and we don't return to the state of rest and repair. The cortisol keeps suppressing our immune system, and our SNS maintains the higher heart rate and blood pressure. Our muscles become chronically tense and sore, with lactic acid building

Welcome...

...to the second edition of the Human Touch Therapies Newsletter! Already there is an improvement relative to the first edition: a slightly better looking html newsletter instead of a pdf. I hope you enjoy reading it!

The website hasn't changed much since last time. However I have been working with a graphic designer and am now very close to revealing my new logo and colour scheme! Following that, the website will also be redesigned and look more professional (hopefully).

Winner of free treatment

The winner of this edition's prize draw will be e-mailed today. Congratulations!

I have decided to also give away two runners-up prizes: a 10% discount off your next treatment. The runners up will also receive an e-mail today.

Other stuff

Since June my holistic massage service has been fully up and running, following my

up and fluid circulation and muscle functioning being restricted. Our digestive system remains suppressed. Eventually our immune system can't fight infection or illness anymore, our adrenal glands are depleted and we become more susceptible to cardiovascular disease. Our muscles and hormonal glands become fatigued from the constant stimulation, and we may develop conditions such as stomach ulcers or IBS.

So how can we return to that state of rest and repair? Can massage help?

When we receive massage, messages of "touch" are sent to our brain. Our brain then decides whether the touch is positive. It does that by comparing it to similar experiences in the past. If the massage is perceived as a positive experience, the PNS is activated and the output of cortisol is reduced. The body now returns to its state of rest and repair: whilst enjoying the massage, our breathing and circulation slow down, our anxiety decreases, and sometimes our stomach even starts gurgling, as a sign that our digestive system is also turning back to normal functioning.

In addition to indirectly affecting the autonomous nervous system and the hormonal system, massage also has a direct effect on the systems of the body that have been suffering from chronic stress.

For example our circulation is stimulated by massage, helping the transport of nutrients and removal of waste products. And our muscles can be relieved from their chronic tense state as certain massage techniques locally stimulate and stretch the muscle fibers. Removal of lactic acid and other wastes takes place, and oxygen and nutrients are flushed through the muscles. Our breathing can be further deepened by massaging the breathing muscles. And digestive problems may benefit from abdominal massage.

After a nice massage, we feel more relaxed, experience less pain, and we sleep better. Our body as well as our mind have a chance to recover from the effects of the prolonged stress response. Regular massage can help prevent switching back to this chronic state, maintaining a long-term healthier balance of our body processes. Which makes us feel happier too!

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official qualification. I now practice in a lovely therapy room at a small clinic on Alma Vale Road in Clifton, on Thursday evenings and Friday afternoons.

I have started my NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) course now as well, this will finish in November. Following that, I aim to add individual coaching sessions as well as group workshops to the Human Touch Therapies repertoire by the end of this year, in cooperation with a Dutch company: "Institute of Social Engineering"

I also intend to do more bodywork training later this year.

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