

Wheat Ridge Wellness Broadcast

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

The Power of Touch

In a High-tech World, It Pays to Reach Out

Nora Brunner

Physician and holistic health pioneer Rachel Naomi Remen once confessed that as a pediatric intern she was an unrepentant baby kisser, often smooching her little patients as she made her rounds at the hospital. She did this when no one was looking because she sensed her colleagues would frown on her behavior, even though she couldn't think of a single reason not to do it.

The lack of basic human contact in our high-tech medical system reflects a larger social ill that has only recently started to get some attention--touch deprivation. The cultural landscape is puzzling. On the one hand, we are saturated in suggestive messages by the

skin-to-skin contact is beneficial to human health, American social norms inhibit this most basic form of human interaction and communication. Despite our supposedly enlightened attitudes, we Americans are among the most touch-deprived people in the world.

"Touch deprivation is a reality in American culture as a whole," writes Reverend Anthony David of Atlanta. "It's not just babies needing to be touched in caring ways, or the sick. It's not just doctors and nurses needing to extend it. It's all of us, needing connection, needing to receive it, needing to give it, with genuine happiness at stake."



High-tech can mean low-touch. Ensure you're getting the tactile connection humans require.

mass media; on the other hand, the caring pediatrician is afraid someone might look askance at her planting a kiss on a baby's forehead. What's wrong with this picture?

Social Norms

Unfortunately, touch has become, well, a touchy subject. Though there's growing scientific evidence that

Distant, Disconnected

How did we come to deprive ourselves so tragically? According to Texas psychology professor David R. Cross, PhD, there are three reasons Americans don't touch each other more: fear of sexual innuendo, societal and personal

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Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom.

-Albert Einstein

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disconnection aided by technology, and the fact that the ill effects of non-touching are simply not that obvious and don't receive much attention.

It's no surprise Americans are often afraid physical touching signals romantic interest, which leads to the twin perils of either having our intentions misunderstood or wondering if someone's gesture is an uninvited advance. This ambiguity is more than enough to scare most people from taking someone's arm or patting them on the back.

The potential for the loaded gesture is further complicated by our litigious society in which unwelcome touch can mean, or be interpreted as, dominance, sexual harassment, or exploitation. People in the helping professions are regularly counseled on how to do their jobs without creating even a hint of ambiguity. In one extreme example, counselors at a children's summer camp were given the advice that when kids proactively hugged them, the counselors were to raise both arms over their heads to show they hadn't invited the contact and weren't participating in it. One wonders how the innocent minds of children will interpret this bizarre response to their spontaneous affection.

Another reason for touch phobia, according to Cross, is that we live in a society with far-flung families and declining community connections. Technology plays a significant role in the way we communicate, and it seems we move farther away from face-to-face communication with every new invention. How ironic that the old telephone company jingle that encouraged us to "Reach Out and Touch Someone" gave way to the slew of electronic devices we have today, all ringing and beeping for our attention. While these devices were invented to improve communication, some people wonder if the net effect is lower quality in our exchanges of information.

While there is scientific research showing non-touch is detrimental to health, Cross says those negative effects aren't obvious. The effects of a lack of touch are insidious and long-term and don't amount to a dramatic story for prime time.

"Humans deprived of touch are prone to mental illness, violence, compromised immune systems, and poor self-regulation," Cross says. So serious are the effects of touch deprivation, it's considered by researchers to be worse than physical abuse.

Benefits of Touch

Stated more positively, science does support the preventive health benefits of touch. For example, Tiffany Field, PhD, founder of the Touch Research Institute, notes that in a study on preterm infants, massaging the babies increased their weight and allowed them to be discharged earlier. Discharging babies earlier from expensive neonatal intensive care units could save the healthcare system \$4.7 billion annually.

In other research, scientists at the University of North Carolina found the

stress hormone cortisol was reduced with hugging. Cortisol is associated with anger, anxiety, physical tension, and weakened immunity.

Massage therapy has been found useful in reducing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, pain, and stress, and is helpful for those suffering with a variety of illnesses, including anorexia nervosa, arthritis, cancer, fibromyalgia, and stroke. While more research is needed, massage therapy has also been shown to reduce symptoms associated with alcohol withdrawal and smoking cessation, and can strengthen self-esteem, boost the immune system, increase flexibility, and improve sleep.

As a nation, we are still finding our way in terms of increasing our touch quotient; but those who make their way into a massage therapy room are farther along than most.



Massage helps boost self-worth and contribute to emotional well-being and connection.

Are Your Candles Safe?

How to Choose Toxin-free Flames

Glynnis Osher

There is nothing like the inviting glow of a candle to make us feel relaxed, guide us into a meditative state, or harmonize the ambiance of a room. With all these life-enhancing attributes, it is troubling to think that many candles are toxic and doing more harm than good--but that may be the case.

The Problem

Most candles today are made from paraffin wax, a petroleum by-product that emits toxic fumes and soot into the air. There are up to eleven known carcinogenic compounds in paraffin candles that are considered toxic air agents by the state of California. Burning these candles can cause harm to the heart, lungs, circulatory, and nervous systems, especially a concern for young children, the elderly, and those with asthma or other already established respiratory problems. In addition, the burning of the fragrant oils in scented candles can create significant air pollution, as well.

Another possible hazard: wicks. While

U.S. candle makers voluntarily agreed 25 years ago to prohibit lead wicks, some imported candles may still contain lead. Ensure you're burning cotton wicks only.

The Solution

The good news is, you can still enjoy burning candles because there are safe and healthy alternatives. Conscious candle choices include beeswax and the increasingly popular soy wax. Unlike petroleum, soy is a sustainable and renewable resource. Soy wax is a vegetable by-product that is biodegradable and nontoxic. Many candle enthusiasts prefer soy candles because they burn clean and release very little or no soot into the air. Also, because soy wax is water soluble, clean up is easy and containers can be easily washed and reused. Another benefit of soy wax is the cooler burning temperature, making for a much longer burning candle.

For more information visit the website www.themysticmasala.com.



Candles are for relaxation, not toxification.

Hibernating is for the Bears

Plan to Stay Fit This Winter

Winter's here, and you've moved your running shoes to the back of the closet until April. Yet that piece of pumpkin pie has your name on it.

With the onset of colder weather, shorter days, and snow-covered streets, we eat more and exercise less, waiting for the spring thaw to get back in shape. Instead of having to make New Year's resolutions to lose holiday weight and join a health club, why not set goals to stay fit this winter?

MOVE FITNESS INDOORS

Winter is the perfect time to start a weight-training program. When it's sunny and warm in summer, you'd rather be outside cycling or rock climbing. When it's snowing, why not

lift weights for 30 minutes during lunch? Statistics show that more people suffer heart attacks in winter from shoveling snow, often because they're out of shape. With regular strength training, you'll be able to shovel that snow and get a head start with outdoor sports when spring comes around.

WALK OUTSIDE ON WEEKENDS

Going for a jog or walk during mid-day when the sun is high is a great time to get outside and catch a few rays. Be sure to dress warmly, wear sunscreen, and drink plenty of water. Dehydration is most common in colder months when you're less aware of fluid loss.

TAKE A DANCE CLASS

Accept that invitation to the New Year's

Eve celebration and take a class in ballroom dancing. While you're dancing, you're not hanging around the buffet table or the bar, and your waistline will thank you for it.

REDISCOVER ICE SKATING

Whether it's on a frozen pond or at a rink, ice skating provides seasonal exercise opportunities, especially good for the legs. And it's great fun, bringing out the kid in all of us.

CONSIDER SNOWSHOEING

Snowshoeing is just a matter of strapping snowshoes onto your boots and walking. Snowshoes make hiking trails and snowy city parks accessible and can be rented from sporting goods stores at a relatively inexpensive price.

The capacity to devote yourself to the welfare of others yields otherwise unobtainable power and potential for good.

-Dalai Lama

AVOID THE WINTER CHILL

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- Deep Tissue massage
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After all, everyBODY deserves a massage!

Wheat Ridge Wellness Massage

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