

THE CENTER for CLINICAL MASSAGE

Ken Laymon

Relaxation impacts heart health

February is heart month

It's heart month! In February, the American Heart Association steps up its educational efforts communicating the seriousness of heart disease and its prevention.

Relaxation and heart health

A range of techniques including massage, relaxing music, guided relaxation and yoga have shown promising results in lowering blood pressure and heart rate — factors that have a positive effect on heart health. Recent research indicates that relaxation techniques can reduce strain on the heart.

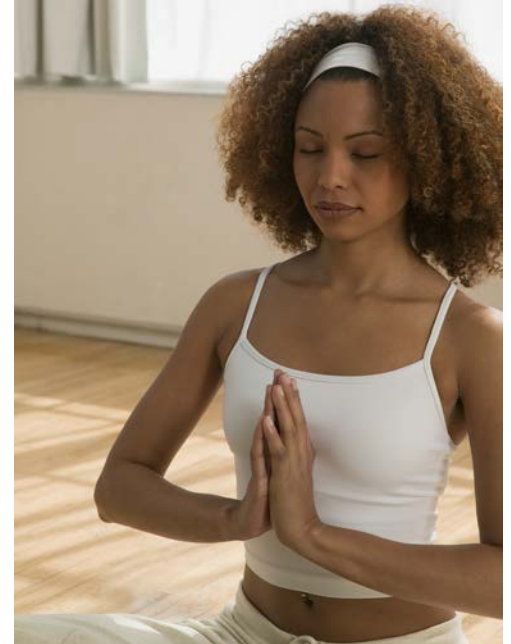
One study from Duke University followed cardiac patients over a period of years. The program included education on stress and specific techniques to relax the body and mind. Participants in the program showed a significant reduction in heart attacks. In another study, at Cedars Sinai Medical Center, yoga and meditation significantly reduced the impact of cardiac disease on patients.

Taking charge

Many people feel victimized by stress. But relaxation can reverse the ill effects of stress by helping you learn to respond differently.

The key is to practice relaxing regularly. If you take time during your workday for a 15-minute massage, a lunchtime yoga class, or simply breathing slowly and deeply for several minutes, you'll let go of stress buildup and start to relax. If you make this a regular habit, you can retrain your mind to stay balanced in the face of stress.

So this month get an extra massage, take a yoga class every single week, or start that meditation practice again. Your heart will thank you!



Practicing regular relaxation can reduce strain on the heart.

Give the gift of massage

The perfect Valentine's present

“Our favorite gifts are the ones that allow us to express emotion and make us feel special,” said gift expert and author of *The Perfect Present*, Robyn Spizman. “They are personal expressions of our feelings for each other.”

One survey found that 46 percent of the respondents said that they think flowers and candy are too nonspecific to show someone you care about them, and 51 percent would not care if their significant other passed on Valentine's Day gifts.

A gift of massage is a welcome exception: a caring gift of therapeutic, healthful touch. And if your special someone has never had massage, don't be afraid to introduce them to it. According to one consumer survey, first-time massage clients regard their massage experience as highly positive.

Massage is also a “green” gift — one that satisfies the increasing consumer demand for experiences instead of more possessions. Massage is the kind of present people of all ages are looking for, and it matches most everyone's values and budgets.



Massage is a caring gift that fits most people's values and budgets.

Massage for couples

Learn to give and receive

Does your life with your partner seem full of chores with little time for fun and relaxation? On Friday nights, do you sometimes rub your partner's back but find your hands tire quickly? Or that you just can't seem to relieve the tension in his or her muscles?

Increase trust and closeness

If you haven't yet learned how to give your sweetie a therapeutic massage, February is the perfect time. Receiving massage from your partner can yield all the benefits you expect like reduced stress, decreased achiness and improved sleep. But it can also do wonders for your relationship. It's a way to get away from interruptions, have a chance to listen to each other (body language as well as words), and increase trust and feelings of closeness.



Exchanging massage with your partner can help reduce stress while increasing closeness.

“The fact that people are spending quality time with their partner and learning how to give nurturing touch really enhances their bond and gives them a chance to discover touch as a way to communicate,” reports Doug O'Connor, a licensed massage therapist who has taught massage classes for 15 years, in *Today's Local News*, San Marcos, California.

How to find instruction

You can find a massage class for couples in most communities. Many therapists offer private classes in their studios teaching simple, easy-to-remember, stress-reducing techniques. You'll also learn techniques to minimize stress on the giver. The result: you'll be able to give each other relief from daily stress, tension headaches, minor injuries, and other aches and pains.

A class with your partner is a wonderful way to be introduced to massage. If one of you isn't comfortable getting undressed for a professional massage, sharing massage at home is one solution. Just think, with a massage class for two, you can receive massage often — and from your sweetheart, too.



*Life is short and it's up to you
to make it sweet.*

—Sadie Delaney,
Co-author, *Having Our Say*