

STRESS & Massage Therapy

Everyone experiences it. No one is immune, because stress is a necessary component of life. But you don't have to let it overpower you. You can learn to manage your response to stress. By gaining more control over your body's automatic reactions to anxiety-producing situations, you can reduce the negative effects of stress in your life.

What Stress does to you

Your body reacts unconsciously to situations you find threatening. Its emergency stress response primes you for flight or flight by causing certain physiological changes to take place:

- your body produces additional adrenaline
- your heart beats faster and more blood flows into your larger muscles
- your breathing becomes shallow and you start to perspire
- the functioning of your immune and digestion systems is inhibited
- the flow of blood to your extremities and internal organs is decreased

Frequent or unrelenting stress can damage your body, ultimately leading to discomfort or pain. It's a contributing factor in most disease processes. The adverse effects of stress can manifest themselves as:

- high blood pressure
- changes in blood sugar
- ulcers
- headaches
- hypertension
- colitis
- heart disease

You can understand why accumulated stress and tension can spoil much of pleasure and productivity you find in life.

What Massage does to Stress

The antidote to stress is the relaxation response. During the relaxation response, your endocrine and nervous systems activate changes to slow your heart rate, improve your circulation and digestion, and relax your muscles-in-direct counteraction to the stress response.

There are many activities that can trigger the relaxation response, such as exercise, deep breathing, meditation, or listening to soothing music.

Of course, one of the best methods to combat stress is therapeutic massage.

Massage can dramatically reverse the damaging physiological effects of stress by helping to:

- lower your heart rate and blood pressure
- improve your circulation
- raise your skin temperature
- heighten your sense of well-being

- cause your anxiety level to drop

During the massage, your tight muscles tend to relax and the pain associated with chronic tension is relieved. Increased circulation will supply more oxygen and nutrients to your muscles and help rid them of metabolic waste. Blocked, deadened areas are thus able to respond to sensory input again. Massage also stimulates release of the body's own natural pain killers – the endorphins.

A program of regular massage will put you in touch with your body, teaching you to monitor its signals and needs so you'll know when you should take time out from the things that worry you. In this way, you can avoid the damaging effects of chronic stress and gain control over your sense of well-being.