

# Taming Tension Naturally

By Dr. Daniel Strelcheck and staff

You might think of a massage only as health spa or beauty shop luxury. But did you know that massage therapy is used as an essential part of treating certain health conditions?

## Natural Relief

Therapeutic massage can cause your body to release natural painkillers, help the chiropractic adjustment of the spine and boost your immune system.

The long list of health benefits makes it an attractive and welcome prescription for stress, pain and anxiety relief.

In my clinic, we have patients that have found massage helpful for:

- **Anxiety.** Because massage involves direct human touch, it can make you feel cared for. That special attention helps improve mood and reduce anxiety in those suffering from depression. For that same reason, it is also useful in helping adults trying to quit smoking, lose weight and reduce dependency on alcohol or drugs.
- **Pain.** Pain can be decreased in people with back and other chronic pain conditions such as fibromyalgia, multiple sclerosis and migraine headaches. Those that receive regularly scheduled massage therapy as part of their overall treatment program may have more energy, improved range of motion and greater flexibility.
- **Pregnancy.** Massage after the first trimester appears to lessen stress and anxiety, relax muscles along with reducing edema and various body pains associated with pregnancy.
- **Sports-related soreness.** Most professional athletes, like basketball and football players, receive massages after a game or work out. A massage helps increase blood flow to your muscles and reduce muscle soreness by accelerating the elimination of lactic acid created during exercise.

## What's It Like?

During a massage, your therapist moves and manipulates a body's soft tissues — muscles, skin and tendons — using their fingertips, palms and knuckles. Sessions generally last an hour. There are hundreds of massage techniques. Most familiar are the Swedish, trigger point, hot stone, deep tissue. No matter what kind of massage you get, you should feel calm and relaxed during and after your massage. When you go for a massage, you can expect to:

- **Answer a few questions.** Before the massage, your massage therapist will ask what you want from your massage and about any health conditions you may have. This will make your massage effective and specific to your needs.
- **Disrobe.** You'll be asked to remove as much clothing as you are comfortable with. Your therapist is trained to give you privacy while you take your clothes off and keep you covered as much as possible throughout the massage. If taking your clothes off doesn't sound relaxing or if you're pressed for time, try a clothing on chair massage. These massages are done while seated in a special chair that allows the therapist to massage your back, shoulders, neck, arms, legs, hands and feet.
- **Lie down.** Most massages require you to lie face down on a warmed and padded table. Pillows or bolsters might be used to position you during the massage. Music usually plays softly while you're massaged.
- **Get rubbed the 'right' way.** If a massage therapist is pushing too hard, tell them. Occasionally you may have a sensitive spot that feels like a knot, which may continue to be uncomfortable while your massage therapist works it out. But if it becomes too painful, speak up.

If you haven't experienced massage, I encourage you to ask your health professional about how it can improve your health. At the very least, professional therapeutic massage can be an effective method to help you feel less tense, more comfortable and able to enjoy your life.