

# Relaxation this Spring

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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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*I've never met  
a strong person  
with an easy  
past.*

-Unknown

#### Office Hours and Contact

**Mental Escape Massage**  
**Kelly Lewis, NCTMB, CPM**  
**913-424-8517**  
**Mon-Fri 10-5 & Wed 10-4**  
**Wednesday I'm at Salon Mission**  
**On the Sprint Campus**

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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.

# What Is Reiki?

## Understanding Energy Work

A type of energy bodywork, reiki (pronounced ray-key) relies on the ancient belief in the life force energy, referred to as chi, that flows through all things. This life force runs throughout pathways in the body called meridians, nourishing organs and cells and supporting vital functions. When this energy is disrupted by negative thoughts, feelings or actions, illness and disease result. A reiki practitioner's hands hover just above a person's body, sensing the affected areas and infusing them with positive flow. This raises the energetic vibration and breaks up the negativity to heal, clear and restore the natural flow of the life force. The reiki practitioner, trained to access and serve as a channel for the life energy, places his hands on or just above the client's body and uses a passive touch that some clients experience with warmth or tingling. The hands remain in position for 3-5 minutes, alternately covering 10-12 positions over the body.

Thought to be Tibetan Buddhist in

origin, the practice of reiki is comprised of three levels of training. Through this training, the practitioner learns how to access energy flow through the hands to heal. Completion of the third and highest level of training results in the title of reiki master. Reiki is used to accelerate healing, assist the body in cleansing toxins, balance the flow of subtle energy by releasing blockages, and help the client contact the healer within.

According to [www.reiki.org](http://www.reiki.org), reiki is beginning to gain acceptance as a meaningful and cost-effective way to improve patient care in hospitals and clinics across America. In an interview on the website, Dr. David Guillion, an oncologist at Marin General Hospital in California, says, "I feel we need to do whatever is in our power to help the patient. We provide state of the art medicine in our office, but healing is a multidimensional process. I endorse the idea that there is a potential healing that can take place utilizing energy." For more information, consult your

bodywork practitioner.



Reiki balances subtle but vital energy.

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# The Scoop on Meditation

## A Simple Practice with Profound Benefits

People who meditate regularly appear internally and externally five to 10 years younger than their non-meditating peers, according to author Deepak Chopra. That's good news for the estimated 10 million people who practice meditation on an ongoing basis and experience the resulting calm it cultivates.

The rich benefits come from doing something that looks like nothing: Sitting still, being quiet, and breathing deeply. Meditation works simply but profoundly by defusing the onslaughts of life - a racing mind, busyness, deadlines, commutes, all of which have physiological effects on well-being. Meditation calms the nervous system, decreases metabolic rate, heart rate, and blood pressure, and lowers levels of cholesterol, stress hormones, and free

radicals. It also has a direct effect on breathing, slowing and deepening respiration so more oxygen circulates throughout the body. Not only that, meditation is said to lessen feelings of anxiety and depression and improve memory and concentration. And all of this culminates in slowing the aging process, as Chopra notes.

There are many meditation techniques, including focusing on a mantra, a sacred word or phrase, or your breath. But the basic intent of all meditation is focus and attention. And it doesn't take hours a day in an ashram to meditate effectively. Benefits kick in with even a short period of devoted time.

How to begin? Wear comfortable, unrestrictive clothes, sit on a cushion or chair with your back straight (think once

again, comfort), rest your hands on your legs, let your eyes go soft and out of focus or close them, breathe slowly and deeply, and - the hardest part - attempt to empty your mind of thoughts and quiet the internal dialogue. When thoughts flit through your mind, let them pass without judging them and come back to your focus (your mantra, counting, etc.) and breathing.

Start with this sitting meditation technique for five minutes a day, and add on time as you get more at ease with the process. For more information on techniques and benefits, check out [www.abc-of-meditation.com](http://www.abc-of-meditation.com).

*You are a living magnet. What you attract into your life is in harmony with your dominate thoughts.*

-Brian Tracy

I'll be massaging in Overland Park, KS at Naka-kon on March 11-13th again this year. So feel free to stop by the booth!

You can still find me inside Seeking Solace Yoga near 91st & Metcalf on weekdays.

I will be raising my rates this summer by \$10 for new clients and those that have not been in for at least 6 months. To ensure your rate doesn't increase, make your appointment by May 31st as they will increase on June 1st.

Be sure to call or email ahead to ensure you get the time you want and need!

I hope everyone has a great month!

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## Mental Escape Massage

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