



## **Massage and Breath Work: a strategy to long term health and happiness**

Manifesting health, happiness, long term stress relief and pain management, is in big part a process of becoming aware of yourself and your innate healing ability. As a massage therapist I help people achieve this by teaching them how to breathe during their massage, and through their breath educating them on how to reconnect to their bodies. Coordinating their inhales and exhales with massage strokes to bring blood back to stiff muscles, to stretch fascia and release areas of pent up memories and emotions within the soft tissue. As people release pain and old tensions and let them go, they develop an awareness of their bodies that they did not have before; and typically do not return to old negative patterns.

Stress in the West is norm, and the negative patterns of shallow breathing and physical agitation are common. So ordinary are they that we do not even realize how much stress we manifest in our bodies. Stress causes us to breathe in a shallow manner, using only a small fraction of our true lung capacity. Superficial breathing reinforces our feeling of nervous tension – mentally and physically, and becomes a cycle that feeds on itself. It becomes our life pattern. This nervous tension floods our bodies with chemicals associated with the flight/fight response, it causes our muscles to contract, and decreases the amount of oxygen in our blood, resulting in more quick, shallow breaths just to get the oxygen we require. To reverse this negative pattern we need to reinstate our intended breathing style – long, deep, full.

Pay attention to the way a child breathes. You will notice that a child's breath is long, deep, and full. When a baby breathes you will notice her stomach rise, rise, rise, becoming big and round, and then gently fall. Just watching this is relaxing. Now I want you to take a long, slow, deep breath. How do you feel? It is amazing how profoundly relaxing a slow, deep breath is. It is impossible to feel or be stressed out if you do so.

When coming into a massage session most of my adult clients lie on the table anticipating relaxation, but hold their breath – without even realizing, when I point it out to them they are shocked. I gently remind them, “breathe”. I urge them to do so 3 times before I even touch them. If their breath is shallow, I teach them ‘deep belly breathing’. By their third breath their face gently calms down, their hands fall to their sides and they *begin* to relax. As they lie on the table breathing deeply I watch the harmony of body and breath, looking for places where the breath is not moving easily and where muscle resistance is rife. By becoming aware of my client's body and the rhythm of their breath, I know where to massage.

Our breath should travel smoothly in and out of our lungs, expanding our diaphragm and chest as we inhale and exhale. This breathing rhythm should flow smoothly throughout our body. Try



this. Sit comfortably, breathe deeply, close your eyes and follow your breath as it travels into each and every body part. Become aware of where your breath flows freely and where you experience a sensation of blockage. The areas that feel blocked or tense are areas of muscle tension. This is where your breath and the therapeutic massage work need to be focused. Your massage therapist will be able to feel those areas of tension also. By focusing your breath into pockets of tension in your body, and coordinating your breath with the massage therapist's strokes, you can quickly release areas of chronic tension within your muscles. Sometimes as this happens, memories, emotions, and even traumas come to the surface.

When we internalize our stress, our muscles and even organs become the storage space for our memories, thoughts and emotions. But our breath helps release them, and together with therapeutic touch (massage) you can let go of negative patterns of physical and emotional stress. Through breath work you allow blood and oxygen to return to your entire body. You develop self awareness. Remember, to manifest wellness always be positive and mark all your successes no matter how small. Throughout your day take a minute to yourself to breathe. And do not forget, that if you have an ache or a pain, rather than ignoring it, bring your awareness to it, breathe deeply into it, and watch it melt away!