

## Stop Judging Your Beautiful Self

### Massage Fits You (yes, YOU!)

Rebecca Jones

Sol Benson loathed her body. It went beyond mere embarrassment at how "fat" she was. Deeper still was the conviction that her body was unworthy of love, underserving of nurturing.

And it was that alienation from her own body that for years kept Benson, a professional dancer who has waged a lifelong battle with anorexia, from getting massage. "I stayed away because getting a massage was being good to myself," said the 45-year-old Colorado mother of two, whose own mother and brother are massage therapists. "If I'm on a weight loss cycle, it's like 'I don't deserve love, I don't deserve food, I don't deserve to feel good about myself.'"

Benson explains, that helped the process. Her nonjudgmental ways helped Benson maintain balance. If, however, Rose had brought up weight, or in this case, the lack thereof, Benson admits it could have sent her into another purging cycle.

### Managing Body Image

Benson's story illustrates just how complex the issues of body image can be in 21st century America and just how valuable bodywork is in mending distorted body image.

Developing a positive body image is about becoming present, grounded, open, aware, and unafraid to find what's

*Our bodies are  
our gardens –  
our wills are  
our gardeners.  
–W. Shakespeare*



Self-acceptance is the first step to a healthier lifestyle and a happy relationship with yourself.

Benson credits Mary Rose--a Boulder, Colorado, massage therapist who has developed a special style of acupressure for the physically fragile--with understanding her psychological fragility enough to help her turn massage into a tool for healing, rather than a doorway to despair.

at the core and work through it. It's about being mindful, and listening to what your body has to say--a big step on the way to a healthier lifestyle and not necessarily an easy one to take. It requires courage and hard work to learn self-acceptance. And bodywork can play a key role in this endeavor.

It was the tender care from Rose,

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With America in the grip of an obesity epidemic--while at the same time holding up waif-like thinness as a cultural ideal--many people are worried about excess pounds and the harsh judgments that accompany them. Embarrassment at the thought of uncovering imperfect bodies for the close contact of a massage or bodywork session drives away untold numbers of potential clients.

The problem isn't limited to issues of weight. Many people avoid massage because of embarrassment about acne, surgical scars, birthmarks they consider unsightly, or some other physical deformity or flaw.

"A really common one is, 'I have such ugly feet,'" Rose says. "I always laugh and say that in 20 years, I haven't seen an ugly foot yet. People just have bad attitudes about their feet. In general, people are so self-judgmental."

## Relax, Really

Massage therapists specialize in the human body. They don't judge; rather, they see anatomy.

"This is something that's so prevalent and something we deal with daily," says Jonathan Burt, 27, a Detroit massage therapist and massage instructor. "I can't tell you how often I've heard, 'I have to wait until I get into shape before I come in for a massage.' Clients think they have to be in shape before they can relax." Newsflash: Relaxation is not exclusive to model body types.

Given the increased blood flow that results from massage, as well as the benefits to the lymphatic and other body systems, Burt believes overweight people and others who suffer from limited mobility are the people most likely to benefit from a good massage. That's why he especially treasures his larger clients.

The idea of taking your clothes off for a massage is often more intimidating than the reality. In fact, practitioners make draping an art form, ensuring the client doesn't feel exposed. And by the way, says Burt, you're not the only imperfect body around here. "We all have flaws," says Burt, who gave his first massage at age seven, when his grandmother, a double amputee, asked him to massage her stumps. "Myself, I'm not the

American Gladiator. I inform people I have flaws as well, and I'd be more than willing to help them overcome their self-consciousness."

## Viewpoint: Compassion

We're all in this together, and your massage therapist is operating from a place of compassion. Your practitioner is there to create and hold a safe space for you. Says Charlie Murdach, 38, a Portsmouth, New Hampshire, massage therapist, "For me, it's meeting the person where that person is and addressing that person in an appropriate and compassionate way."

Murdach, who has been a massage therapist since 1990, says he has yet to meet a potential client that he can't help, regardless of that person's physical condition. He believes this is due to the massage therapist's ability to avoiding

forcing anything, but to also being open to the possibility that miracles can happen.

Murdach explains your practitioner's role: "Whatever is going on with that person, whether it's a deformity or some type of disability, I make sure I can step up and hold the waters calm for that person. It doesn't matter if they're missing an arm, or have a deformed hand, the person who is standing there desires to move forward."

Getting a massage can do wonders for body image and help bridge the disconnect between the physical and emotional. A wounded psyche can lead you to believe you don't deserve a massage; this is when you most do! You are worthy--book your massage today.



**Bodywork can boost self-esteem and confidence, and even improve body image.**

# A Walking Workout

## Have Fun While Burning More Calories

Imagine the lone hiker, backpack laden with sleeping bag and bedroll, wielding a well-worn walking stick as she climbs the side of a snow-covered mountain. For centuries, trekkers have used walking sticks, partly as a defense against attacking wildlife, partly to aid in balance, and partly as support on long, arduous climbs. But in recent years, many hikers have replaced the single wooden walking stick with hiking poles.

Held in both hands and used to distribute weight more evenly through the four limbs, wilderness hikers have found poles invaluable for safety, efficiency, and comfort on long hikes. What wilderness hikers have known for some time now is that walking poles are a great way to relieve pressure on knees, ankles, and the back. They encourage better posture and provide a total body workout by engaging the upper body.

Now, hiking poles are showing up in urban areas as fitness walkers discover the benefits they provide. Nordic

walking--similar in technique to cross-country skiing--is a great way to get a whole body workout, increase oxygen consumption, and burn more calories than regular walking or even speed walking. This total body workout burns 40 percent more calories and consumes 25 percent more oxygen. Poles can be purchased at most outdoor sporting stores, along with rubber tips for use on paved paths.

### TECHNIQUE

Adjust your poles to approximately 70 percent of your height and loosely secure the straps around your wrists. Hold the poles at an angle behind you so they propel you forward with a slight bend at the elbow. Use an opposite hand-and-heel motion as you walk--right heel strikes as left pole tip contacts the ground. And you're on your way! Don't be shy with your poles. Remember: You're burning 40 percent more calories.

For more information, visit

[www.walking.about.com/od/nordicwalking/index.htm](http://www.walking.about.com/od/nordicwalking/index.htm).



**Add walking poles, and burn more calories.**

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# Flotation Tanks

*Brandon Twyford*

If you want to take the concept of completely stopping even further, try totally unplugging from the noise of everyday life in a flotation tank.

Developed in 1954 to test the effects of sensory deprivation, the flotation tank is now used in a range of restorative and healing practices, including recovery from exercise or injury. It is also an effective tool for visualization techniques.

The tank contains water heated to the exact temperature of the skin--thereby removing the sense of touch--and 800-1,000 pounds of Epsom salt for buoyancy. The result is a unique sensation that's completely unlike floating in a pool. It's more like floating in space. When we float in a normal pool, or even when we are asleep in bed, tiny muscles throughout our body are constantly working to adjust and support

us. The flotation tank, however, allows you to completely let go.

I first experienced floating in 2006 on the recommendation of a friend. The idea sounded intriguing to me, so I decided to try it out by booking a session at my local yoga studio. I disrobed, put my earplugs in, and climbed into the tank. I laid back, stretched out, and closed my eyes.

Total isolation. The thoughts in my head, previously a subconscious presence of constant background noise, were suddenly deafening. I opened my eyes into pitch-black darkness. I was momentarily disoriented, and it took several minutes before I was able to consciously allow my body and mind to relax. As I did, I felt the dense water support every inch of my body.

At the end of the one-hour session, I was still discovering parts of my body

where I had unconsciously been holding tension. The nape of my neck. My ankles. My ears. My hips. Places I hadn't even known I was using when my body was at rest. As I consciously let go of each of these body parts, I slipped further into a state of total physical relaxation. By the time I left the tank, my body felt more relaxed than it had in years.

Flotation tanks can be found in most cities, often as an auxiliary service at a yoga studio or wellness center, and an hour-long session runs about \$40-\$60. Until the average person can hitch a ride into space, this is as close as we'll get to experiencing total removal from the constant barrage of external stimuli on our overworked senses.

Lie back, close your eyes, and unplug. *Brandon Twyford is assistant editor for Associated Bodywork Massage Professionals.*

*If you don't take  
care of your  
body or your  
mind, where are  
you going to  
live?*

-Author Unknown

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#### GET A CLINICAL MASSAGE FROM DENA!

Wowza, time sure is flying! Before we know it Dena will be graduated with 675 hours of training in massage therapy. As she wraps up her classwork, she needs some bodies to practice clinical massage techniques on. (\*cough\* \*cough\* that's where you come in!)

Clinical massages are the cumulation of all of the work she's done this year put together. She's refining her "regional protocols". Which I doubt means anything to you, lol. Basically she's looking for people with a variety of conditions to help provide relief from unnecessary pain and tension. This can be anything from headaches to whiplash, carpal tunnel syndrome to frozen shoulder, rounded shoulders to plantar fasciitis, and many other conditions in between.

Give us a call today to schedule your session!

## Empowering you to heal yourself

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