

Achieving Full Potential Combining Massage with Yoga and Pilates

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It's well-documented that massage contributes significantly to your health and well-being. By itself, massage relaxes, increases circulation, eases anxiety, and expedites recovery from injury.

But when combining massage with fitness and movement activities, such as yoga and Pilates, it's possible to take your bodywork experiences to another level, helping you to create a complete wellness strategy. Much like a financial portfolio in which the watchword is "diversify," adding movement education to your regular massage appointments can help you create a wellness portfolio, assisting body and mind in reaching their fullest potential.

Relax and Regenerate

Though quite different in methodology, both yoga and Pilates use movement to achieve greater flexibility and range of motion while reducing muscle tension. Yoga typically involves a series of stretching postures (asanas), breathing techniques, and meditative practices. It is designed to rejuvenate and balance the musculature, as well as many of the body's internal systems.

Pilates is more of an exercise regimen based on flowing movements, balance, control, and coordination. Though not cardiovascular in nature, it does work to strengthen muscles and improve body alignment while relieving chronic pain.

Yoga and Pilates require active participation. Massage, by contrast, is a passive experience. Combining the two creates a natural balance of exertion and rest. As yoga and Pilates work to stretch and strengthen weak muscles, massage relaxes and releases subsequent tension, leaving the body feeling whole.

"The therapies balance input with output, sensory with motor functions, rest with activity cycles," says Mary Ann Foster, a Colorado-based somatic patterning and movement specialist. "Movement activities and massage are like sleep and wake states -- they are two ends of a continuum. Everyone knows the better they sleep, the more alert and functional they are during the day. Likewise, the more a person can relax and regenerate (as they do with massage), the better the quality of their sport or movement activities."

Foster suggests that we have to be able to sense our bodies, and how they work, to improve health and performance. "Athletics or movement education and massage both promote body awareness and are therefore vital to healthy learning and living."

Yoga and Pilates add a new dimension to your massage routine. Either will help you receive a better stretch and learn to focus more through breathing techniques, resulting in increased muscle release and more satisfying bodywork. Movement education also stimulates the internal organs, thereby flushing more toxins from the body than through massage alone. Finally, consider the practical benefit of adding variety to your bodywork routine. Blending therapies keeps your sessions from becoming static.

Awareness and Performance

Foster suggests that if more massage clients would exercise, or participate in movement therapies, they would be more empowered to change their body problems. And if more athletes and active types received massage and bodywork, they might improve body awareness and

performance.

"If it doesn't happen naturally, relaxation is a learned process that we have to practice to get skilled at," Foster says. "In the same way someone trains for sports, a person who is stressed needs to train and practice to learn how to relax." Massage and bodywork, in combination with yoga and Pilates, can be part of this training.

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