

## Why Am I Sore? Understanding Massage as the Body's Workout

By Shirley Vanderbilt

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You've just had a wonderful massage, and you go home feeling both relaxed and rejuvenated. But the next morning, you wake up with twinges of muscle soreness, maybe some fatigue, and you just don't feel yourself. What happened? Chances are it's the massage, and it's perfectly OK.

Keith Grant, head of the Sports and Deep Tissue Massage Department at McKinnon Institute in Oakland, Calif., says, "It's very much like doing a workout. If the muscles aren't used to it, they often respond with some soreness." Grant notes this should last for no more than a day or two. If it lasts longer, the massage may have been too intense, and the therapist should adjust for this in the next session. However, just as with exercise, when your body adjusts to having this type of workout, your physical response will also be less intense.

A professional massage is more than an ordinary backrub. Your massage therapist can find all the kinks that have built up from daily stress and too little or too much exercise. The whole point of a therapeutic massage is to release that tension, work out the kinks and help your body relax so it can function at an optimal level. All of this work stretches muscles, pushes blood into them and gets things working again.

There are several theories, in addition to muscle function, as to why people sometimes experience after-effects from massage. Grant points to one theory being closely examined by experts. Neurological sensitivity, or "sensitization," looks at the "whole response of what's going on in a person." As Grant explains, massage provides a significant amount of input to the central nervous system and the body responds to that increased information. Pain and other occasional after-effects may be the result of a system that has received more information than it can handle at that particular time. And because the amount of sensory input we receive during any day or week is always fluctuating, sometimes we may be overloaded and other times not. It depends on the total stress (emotional, spiritual and physical) being experienced by the body at that moment.

So what can you do to minimize sometimes painful side effects? It's important to communicate with your massage therapist regarding your expectations, as well as your current state of health. Your therapist can then tailor the massage to your personal needs and desires, and make adjustments in intensity or technique as the session proceeds. "I'd look at what's being done," says Grant. In some cases, a shorter or more soothing session may be more appropriate. In others, the therapist may need to change the kind of technique used. Much of this can be judged by how the person is feeling and responding during the massage.

Understand that your body is an organism made up of complex systems that react to a constantly changing influx of external factors. Maintain good health practices and keep your mind free of negative clutter. Drink plenty of water immediately following your treatment, and continue to do so for the next day or two. This will rehydrate your tissues and ease the effects. Take it easy after your massage. Go home, relax and just allow your body to find its balance naturally. Like exercise, make bodywork a habitual practice for good health. And if you wake up the next morning a little sore, it's probably because you had a really good massage.

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