

Professional Massage Therapist

Certified Empowerment Coach

By Colleen Steele

317-865-8179 studio

317-625-1046 cell

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A life coach works with relatively healthy people who want to improve their lives in specific ways, such as changing careers, finding a healthy relationship, taking their business to a new level, losing weight or deepening their self-understand, for example. They deal with stress management as well as time management, goal setting and other key areas of change to help their clients lead more balanced lives that better reflect clients' personal values and priorities. Coaching differs from therapy in that the focus is more on the present and future than the past and more on goals and behaviors, and there is a more equal balance of power between the coach and client than between the typical therapist and client.

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Colleen's E-Words



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Welcoming Possibilities

INVESTING FOR THE LONG TERM

When you have your health, you have just about everything. Never is investing for the long term more important than when you are making day-to-day decisions about your health. Every choice you make that favors your health and good habits today translates into better health tomorrow.

Last week's E-letter was all about massage and the latest research. Massage is getting the attention by scientists and laymen alike that can bring it into the realm of the greater importance and dignity that it deserves. But, you already know that if you are a regular recipient of massage therapy. Good for you [literally]!

The short-term benefits of massage are stress and pain relief with relaxation and clear-headedness. Massage therapy as a preventive measure and as ongoing care can mean *fewer visits to the doctor*, as well as *fewer co-pays, prescriptions, and over-the-counter medications*.

Ponder how massage therapy

impacts your ability to make good decisions, cope with extra responsibilities, maintain harmonious relationships with coworkers, family, and friends, and stay on an even keel emotionally and spiritually.

As a reminder, research supports the value of massage. It has been shown to:

- Boost the immune system.
- Improve circulation, concentration, energy, self-esteem, and sleep.
- Reduce anxiety, fatigue, the flow of stress hormones, and the frequency of headaches.
- Release endorphins.

Possible suggestions for incorporating massage in spite of tough economic times. The way we take vacations is changing. Experts say one big vacation a year is less helpful to mental and physical health than shorter breaks at regular intervals. If you are among those who are considering stay-cations, staying closer to home and taking in local attrac-

tions, how about including massage as part of your relaxation. Give massage gift certificates as gift replacements for flowers that wilt, sweaters that don't fit, or another box of fattening candy. Purchase massage packages and share with mothers, daughters, aunts and grandmothers. Consider having chair massage at your place of employment; consider having massage or chair massage at retreats and conferences.

Massage is more than a luxury — it's a vital part of self-care that has a positive ripple effect on you as you work and play. Investing in your health is one thing that's sure to pay off in an uncertain world. **What does massage do for you?** I would love to hear from you by e-mail in this regard.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Colleen is an intuitive Stress Relief "artist" functioning as a Professional Massage Therapist and Certified Empowerment Coach, with 8 and 30 year's, respectively, experience. 317-865-8179 / mtcoach@comcast.net

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ACUPRESSURE, ANOTHER BENEFIT OF MASSAGE BY COLLEEN

Acupressure is an ancient healing art. Finger pressure is used on key points to stimulate the body's natural self-curative abilities. It encourages the release of muscular tension, the increased circulation of blood, and the flow of the body's vital life force (chi) simply by pressing these special points. Like acupuncture, acupressure accesses the energy of the body through the points and meridian pathways — both use the same points and meridian pathways — to influence the health and well-being of a person.

In this system, symptoms are considered an expression of the state of the whole body. For instance, a tension headache may originate in the shoulder and neck area. Using points, acupressure can not only relieve the local head pain and discomfort, but also can reestablish the body's balance — before the stress and strain can cause more problems in other areas of the body.

HISTORY

When there is pain, it is naturally instinctive to hold the place that hurts. More than 5000 years ago the Chinese discovered that when certain places on the body were held, not only did the place that was held feel better, but other remote parts of the body also benefited. Over time, they observed that pressing certain points helped alleviate specific health conditions.

In the early dynasties of China, when stones and arrows were the only weapons available for warfare, unexpected benefit occurred in battle when wounded soldiers reported that symptoms of other disease that they had lived with for years suddenly vanished. Though this baffled ancient physicians, for whom there was no logical relationship between the trauma and the recovery, they continued to observe these phenomena. Stimulating these areas of the surface of the body, by trial and error, these physicians charged the points and developed ways to relieve traumas, dysfunctions and pains in the body. One of these methods was acupressure.

The practice of acupressure began as a folk art in ancient China, India and other Eastern cultures over 5000 years ago, and later migrated to Japan. My instructors in massage school eagerly pointed out to us that this took place without the Internet or snail mail. They did not have each literature circulating. Rather, each community and then each country mapped out the exact same points on the body.

The above-mentioned cultures still use this hands-on healing art today; it

was passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. Through observation of the cycles of nature — day to night, spring to winter, birth to death — the ancients recognized the natural forces of energy which regulate all life, and even discerned the various systems of the human body: circulatory, which includes lymphatic and vascular; neuromuscular; respiratory; digestive; urinary and reproductive systems.

The Chinese call this force *chi*. In Japan it is termed *ki*, while in the Yogic practices of India it is referred to as *prana*. These terms all refer to the same life force which exists in our environment — indeed, the universe—links us to it, and gives us life.

Chi is the cosmic breath of life. It is what creates and nourishes the human spirit, what gives us energy, and what keeps our engines running. Chi is the force of nature that moves in visible and invisible currents and paths through all matter. Chi connects everything. It creates mountains, keeps rivers moving, gives trees their uprightness and their diversity in branching toward heaven. The movement of chi can be seen in the landscape and in the elements, as well as in the human body.

Many things affect chi within the human body: inherited physical traits, amounts and quality of food and rest, stress as well as trauma and injuries. In extreme imbalances mental, emotional or physical problems may occur. The foundation of the Oriental healing arts focuses on balancing the energy flow within all aspects of our being.

How it works. Acupressure points, are places on the skin that conduct bioelectrical impulses in the body. When these points are stimulated with pressure, needles, heat or cold, pain relieving neurochemicals called endorphins are released. As a result, pain is relieved in the affected area. The power and sensitivity of touch, as well as the increased circulation of chi and blood, causes the muscles to relax and promotes healing. *Tension tends to concentrate around acupressure points.* When a muscle is chronically tense or is in spasm, the muscle fibers contract due to the secretion of lactic acid caused by fatigue, trauma, stress, chemical imbalances, poor circulation, diet and lack of exercise.

As a point is pressed, the muscles elongate and relax, allowing blood to flow freely, toxins to be released and eliminated. Increased oxygenation and other nutrients are allowed into the area. *That is just one way* acupressure assists in the health and well-being; it also directly affects emotions. *Watch for more information to come.*

