

# Joe Linn Massage Newsletter

February 2014

Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## Breathe Into Your Massage

### Mindful Breathing Enhances Bodywork Benefits

Cathy Ulrich

During her massage, Elaine was having trouble relaxing, continually talking about all of the stressors in her life. I took a deep breath and asked her to do the same. Suddenly, her body relaxed and I finally felt her respond to the work I was doing. So, what shifted with that simple suggestion?

#### In The Moment

Elaine was thinking about the stresses in her life instead of where she was at the moment. She was in a safe space, receiving gentle, supportive bodywork. And yet she couldn't relax. By simply asking her to be mindful of her breath, she immediately felt her body and became present with me in that space.

control labor pain. By consciously breathing during contractions, they learn to shift the feeling of pain to just sensation.

Elaine came to see me because she had chronic pain in her foot, knee, and hip. Often chronic pain sets up as a vicious cycle of muscle tightness, impaired blood flow, and more pain, even in areas distant from the original problem. When I asked Elaine to send her breath to the foot, she changed her feeling of pain to simply sensation and this opened a door that allowed me to change the holding pattern in her tissue.

Of course she couldn't physically breathe into her foot, but the imagery of

*Everything you  
do can be done  
better from a  
place of  
relaxation.*

-Stephen C. Paul



Mindful breathing brings an individual back into their body, facilitating presence and relaxation.

Many meditation traditions use the breath to quiet the mind. With mindful breathing, we're suddenly thrust into an awareness of our inner spaces and a feeling that we actually do live in a body.

#### Reduce Pain

One of the first things expectant mothers learn in natural childbirth classes is breathing techniques to help

sending warm, healing breath into her foot from the inside while I worked on it from the outside changed her relationship to the pain.

Try this simple technique yourself. As you tune into your breath, notice your body. Is there discomfort or pain?

Continued on page 2

#### Office Hours and Contact

**Joe Linn Massage**

**Joe Linn**

**415-497-3176**

**By appointment only**

**Hours available Monday - Saturday**

**Call today to schedule your massage.**

#### In this Issue

**Breathe Into Your Massage**

**No Pain, No Gain?**

**Try This Breathing Exercise**

Continued from page 1

Breathe in, and think of filling your lungs with healing oxygen. Now breathe out, and imagine sending this warm, healing oxygen directly to the place that hurts. Continue gently breathing into the area for a few minutes. What does it feel like now?

## Relieve Stress

When I worked with Elaine, I noticed that the more she talked about her stressful life, the shallower her breath became. She was breathing high in her chest in short, rapid breaths. Her mind had transported her back to her stressful life, even though she was in a place where she was supported and encouraged to take a break from that stress, putting her body into a fight-or-flight response.

One clear manifestation of this is rapid, shallow breathing. While stress can produce this breathing pattern, the good news is that we can consciously change the breathing pattern and reduce the stress. It works both ways.

As I asked Elaine to slow her breathing and take deeper breaths, the tension in her face softened. Her body relaxed on the table as if she were sinking into the padding. Her feet became warmer, a sure sign that her circulation had changed and that her nervous system had switched from fight or flight to the calming mode of rest and digest.

Try this for yourself. The next time you're feeling stressed, stop for a moment and notice how you're breathing. Is your breath high in your chest? Is it fast and shallow? Now, gently invite your breath to slow down. Start to pull breath into your lungs by letting your belly relax and expand as you inhale. Spend a few moments with yourself and your breath and look at the stressful situation again. Does it seem so bad now?

## Your Massage

Receiving a massage does involve participation on the client's part. While the practitioner is the expert on the bodywork, the clients are the experts on their bodies. In our culture, the client/therapist relationship is often a check-your-body-at-the-door affair. But so much more can happen when the client works with the therapist.

The next time you go for a massage, try these suggestions to achieve mindful breathing and enhance the benefits of your session:

- As you settle onto the table, feel the weight of your body on the table and begin to notice your breath.

- Feel your breath moving of its own accord. Where is it most noticeable? Bring into the spaces that feel less full (without effort--just invite).

- When your therapist starts working, notice the pressure and rhythm. When your practitioner lets up on the pressure, breathe in. When she/he applies pressure, breathe out.

- If your practitioner comes to a tender area, pay special attention to your breath. Work with the tenderness on the exhale, imagining that you're

breathing out the pain.

- As your therapist works on different areas, imagine your breath moving there to meet her. Send your breath wherever she is working. Let her work on the outside, you work on the inside.

- Notice the changes as the massage progresses. Notice your thought patterns. Notice your comfort level. Notice your stress (and how it melts) as you send breath to the various areas of your body.

- When your session is complete and you sit up, notice how your breath feels. What do you notice about your body, the room, the light?

Why not use the lifegiving force of breath to make your next massage an even more beneficial experience. Just breathe.



**Being actively aware of your breath during a massage enhances the benefits of your session.**

# No Pain, No Gain?

## Bodywork Doesn't Have to Hurt to be Effective

Cathy Ulrich

Some people believe massage must be painful to be effective. While some modalities may be intense, this doesn't necessarily translate to a knuckle-biting experience. In fact, painful bodywork can be counterproductive. If you can't breathe comfortably, want to tighten up, make a face, or curl your toes, the technique is too much for you. Your body will go into a protective mode and actually block any positive change.

"No pain, no gain" just doesn't have to apply when it comes to bodywork. Be sure to provide feedback to your practitioner so that you're on the same page. Think of it as a "scale of intensity." On my scale, zero is not touching you and ten is pain--not the worst pain you've ever felt but the place where you want to hold your breath, tighten up, make a face, leave your body. That's a ten.

You shouldn't ever have to be in a pain range to get results, and be sure to let your practitioner know if you're in an

eight or nine range. They may stay at that level if that's where the therapeutic value will be attained, but again, only if it's manageable and you're not tightening up.

And every single client is different. Not only do individuals all start in different places, but their bodies respond differently, and their pain thresholds are extremely varied. What one person finds heavenly, another calls torture.

If it does feel too painful, be sure to tell your therapist. Usually, a practitioner can simply slow down to ease the intensity without losing therapeutic value. Sometimes, if you are nervous or stressed, just remembering to breathe will make your body more open, and you'll remain comfortable.

Bodywork needn't be a test of how tough you are. By giving your therapist appropriate feedback and understanding that painful techniques aren't really helping your body heal, you'll have a

great experience in the session and feel better afterward.



Therapeutic massage actually feels good.

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# Try This Breathing Exercise

Anne Williams

Do you ever find yourself unconsciously holding your breath when you're tense? This can cause tension to build in your body and may let the chest collapse, leading to misalignment.

Proper breathing provides oxygen to the muscles and body, helps you stay relaxed and centered, and even helps you maintain correct body alignment throughout your day.

You can also use breathwork as part of a stress-reduction program by following this progressive relaxation exercise.

1. Begin by lying in a comfortable position without crossing your arms or legs, and focus on your breathing to create a slow, deep pattern. Inhale through your nose while counting to 10 and expanding your abdomen. Hold the breath for one second, and exhale

through your nose on the count of 10. Inhale and exhale in this pattern five times.

2. Beginning with your head, tense your facial muscles as tightly as possible and count to five. Release the muscles completely, and sense the muscles feeling heavy and still. Work down your entire body, tensing muscle groups and then relaxing them. After the head, move to the neck, chest, arms and hands, abdomen, back, thighs and gluteals, lower legs, and feet.

3. After relaxing each set of muscles, mentally scan your body for any areas of remaining tension and ask those areas to relax completely.

4. Repeat the slow breathing exercise.

5. Gently begin to move your body to come out of the deeply relaxed state.

Try using progressive relaxation directly

before or after your sessions, directly before bed, or at any time during the day as a pick-me-up. Focus on taking full, deep, even, rhythmic breaths. With a little practice, you can become more aware of your own breathing patterns and use breathwork effectively as you move throughout your day.

*Those who bring  
sunshine into the  
lives of others,  
cannot keep it  
from themselves.*

-James M. Barrie

Happy Chinese New Year, Ground Hogs, Super bowl, Valentine's, President's day! Wow that's a lot to celebrate in one short month!

It is hard to believe but I have been in my Petaluma office for one year now. Yeah me!

To celebrate I am offering 1 hour massages for \$50 during February, so make sure you take advantage of this great deal. Gift certificates are also available online or in person.

I hope you will enjoy the articles in the February newsletter. "Breathing into your Massage" and "No Pain No Gain: Bodywork does not have to hurt to be effective" offer great insight into how to make your next massage even more effective and enjoyable. "Try this Breathing Exercise" offers a simple step by step process for learning about breath work and how to reduce your stress and increase relaxation.

I look forward to working with you soon!

Be Well  
Joe

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## Joe Linn Massage

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