

The Many Paths to Healing

From the practitioners of Sutter Center for Integrative Health

Better Health Through Bodywork

By Heather Watne, C.M.T.

Your body is your home. It is also your vehicle. Just like a house or apartment, it needs cleaning, maintenance, and occasionally some reorganization and redecorating. And just like a car or bike, it also needs to be checked and tuned up every so often, to run at peak efficiency. Bodywork can help you maintain and even *improve* your home and vehicle, your body. Along with nutritious food, regular exercise, rest, and fun, bodywork can keep your body in optimum running condition.

Bodywork Can Heal on All Levels

You may already know that bodywork has healing physical effects. It can decrease pain and tension, and release toxins from the body. Bodywork also increases relaxation, which strengthens your immune response, and can also improve circulation, digestion, and nervous system functioning.

But we also hold thoughts, feelings and memories in our bodies. Has anyone ever bothered you, giving you a “pain in the neck”? Or have you ever gotten a stomachache or headache from worrisome thoughts? Have you ever been touched in a certain area of your body and spontaneously remembered an old injury or experience you had forgotten about? Bodywork helps to heal on the mental, emotional and spiritual levels by helping the physical body to release the residue from thoughts, feelings and memories that are causing pain, tension and physical suffering.

Different Styles and Techniques

Bodywork is as diverse as the people who receive it. Some types of bodywork are considered “Therapeutic Massage”. Most people know what Therapeutic Massage is, and how it works. These techniques include Shiatsu, Acupressure, Reflexology, Deep Tissue, Swedish and Thai Massage.

Energy Work, which includes techniques such as Reiki, Polarity and Therapeutic Touch, is not as familiar to many people, but can be just as powerful and effective in healing as Therapeutic Massage. Energy Work helps with subtle touch, and often no pressure at all, to “smooth out” and correct energetic imbalances that can be the result of physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual trauma, shock or stress. The practitioner is trained in how to detect these imbalances and becomes a vehicle for healing energy to pass through to, or be activated in the receiver during a session.

Many styles combine both Therapeutic Massage and Energy Work as they work both physical and energetic systems in the body. In my practice, I often integrate techniques to address what the receiver requests, as well as needs that I identify during the assessment. Techniques that I use include the following:

Shiatsu and Acupressure are Asian systems of bodywork that efficiently treat the whole person.

Acupressure involves using pressure on specific points and energy lines (meridians) on the body to relax, nourish and balance the body's systems. These styles are often received on the floor (on a cushion or futon), with receiver clothed in loose garments, and little (if any) oil is used. The practitioner may use her thumbs, hands, elbows or feet to give light to very deep pressure.

Shiatsu includes Assessment as well as Massage and Acupressure; as one of my teachers says "What is diagnostic, is also therapeutic." For example, assisted stretching is one Assessment technique that is also therapeutic.

Reflexology involves working on zones of the hands, feet and ears that correspond to the internal organs and other areas of the body to release toxins and relieve tension. Reflexology can be a complete treatment itself, or incorporated into a session involving other techniques.

Reiki is healing energy that is channeled through the practitioner, and activated in the receiver. Reiki works as Hands-On (to self & others) as well as Distance Healing, using loving intention to help relieve physical suffering, soothe emotional upsets and diffuse mental turmoil. Reiki practitioners must be "attuned" to the energy from a Master Teacher; the technique cannot be "learned" as such.

Healing Intentions

Probably the most important point for improving your health through bodywork is Healing Intention by practitioner and receiver. It is of course the practitioner's job to have healing intentions, and to be physically, emotionally and mentally present during your session. But it is also your responsibility, since you live in your body, which is your home and your vehicle. You will get the most out of a bodywork session if you participate in this way.

Be clear about how you want to inhabit and operate your body, and set your intentions accordingly. Do you want to feel more relaxed? Sleep better? Stop grinding your teeth? Or just generally "tune yourself up"? Bodywork can help you develop a greater awareness of your body, to improve and optimize your health and your experience living in your body.

You Have Choices

In my practice, I offer chair, table and floor massage, as well as ½ hour to 2 hour time slots. Some of my clients mix & match types of sessions, and others stick to the same type each time. This allows me to help a variety of people, perhaps someone just like you.

When seeking bodywork, try several different types and practitioners to find the style and the practitioner that best suits your needs. Keep an open mind about how your body may respond to a certain type of bodywork, and try to experience it with healing intention. Your body's needs may change from time to time; listen carefully and your body will tell you what they are. Be choosy about the practitioner you seek. It is important that you can communicate well with your bodyworker, and that the relationship is positive and reflects appropriate boundaries.

Regular Maintenance is the Key to Health

Your body is just as important, if not more important, than your house or mode of transportation. Treat it as such, and maintain it early and often. If you think you can't afford it, or don't deserve it, or don't need it, ask yourself: what would I do if my house or vehicle needed maintenance? Bodywork is one way you can take good care of yourself, on the many paths to healing.

{Heather Watne has been a professional bodyworker since 1997. She is co-owner of Dynamics Hair & Massage Studio in downtown Davis. Heather received most of her training in Acupressure and Shiatsu from the Acupressure Institute of America in Berkeley, as well as additional training in Reflexology & Reiki in the Central Valley area. For appointments, call Heather at 759-9999.}