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The Gift of Touch

by Laura Laws

Research done across centuries and around the world has proven what most of us realize the first moment someone puts an arm around us, reaches across the table to hold our hand, or envelops us in a hug: there is great power in a single touch. It has been proven that touch makes us better communicators, better friends and better people. Touch is vital to our physical and emotional development and to our overall sense of health and well-being. Touch is at the cornerstone of a healthy relationship with others, and with the self. Touch is, quite simply, remarkable.

There is no better way to demonstrate the importance of touch than by examining what happens when we are deprived of it. Most of us have experienced the sensation of touch deprivation at some point – the need to feel the benefits of touch. But touch deprivation can also have more serious consequences.

In the 19th century, infants in their first year of life commonly died from a disease called Marasmus, a Greek word for “wasting away”. Doctors later discovered that this disease was caused by a lack of touch: babies not touched on a regular basis would literally starve themselves to death. An amazing study completed in the 20th century by touch researcher Ashley Montagu found that children deprived of loving touch suffer the consequences in their bones –small lines of retarded growth, known as Harris lines, appear at



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the ends of the tibia and the radius. Touch affects us to our very core.

Touching eases pain, lessens anxiety, softens the blows of life, generates hope and has the power to heal, according to most experts. In fact, modern psychology and medicine are confirming what mothers across the centuries have intuitively known--namely, the healing power of touch.

The power of touch is felt most strongly in four areas. These areas are biological, communicative, psychological, and social.

From a biological view, various studies and experiments show the simple act of reaching out and touching another person frequently results in physical benefits such as slowing the heart rate, dropping blood pressure and speeding recovery from illness. For example, Dr. James Lynch, professor at Baltimore's University of Maryland School of Medicine conducts extensive studies on touch and its impact upon the body. "Physical contact has very dramatic effects upon psychological health," he says. "It lowers blood pressure. It relaxes you." Studies on infants and children link touch very directly to healthy physical development. And in people of all ages, touch reduces stress, releases serotonin and oxytocins and reduces cortisone levels in the body.

Something to Chew On

Each month, I try to write an article on a topic that would be of special interest to several of our clients and good general info for everyone else. This month, I actually had a client ask about a specific topic: jaw joint dysfunction or better known as TMJ.

Let me begin by answering the question, “What is TMJ?” The initials **TMJ** stand for “**temporomandibular joint**”, or jaw joint. These are



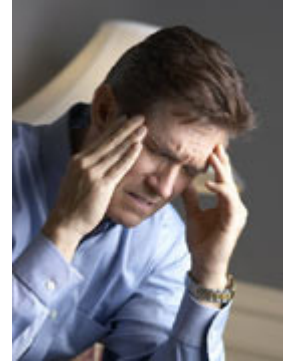
the small joints in front of each ear that attach the lower jaw to the skull, and happen to be the most complex joints in the entire body. The area of the face where the TMJ is located is an intricate network of bones, teeth, muscles, and nerves. Because of this, TMJ

dysfunction conditions affect many areas of the body from the top of the head in migraine-like headaches to numbness or tingling in the arms and pain in the neck or shoulders.

TMJ is a term used to describe a group of symptoms. In many cases, people suffering from TMJ report chronic pain in the jaw, teeth, face, head, neck, shoulders, or back, or any combination of these areas. Snoring, grinding of teeth, frequent ear infections and restricted airway are other problems associated with TMJ. This group of symptoms is also referred to as MPD (myofascial pain dysfunction) and craniomandibular dysfunction.

The majority of people suffer to a greater or lesser degree from TMJ. Although women report more pain from TMJ. TMJ in men causes as much or more damage to the teeth, gums, bones and joints. Children are especially sensitive to TMJ and usually show early signs with ear infections, leaning their

head on an arm, lip, cheek, or finger biting, sucking or chewing, headaches, snoring, grinding of their teeth at night, and significant chewing of gum.



In most cases, **TMJ disorders** stem from having a “**bad bite**” or accidents and trauma. It means that your upper and lower teeth do not close together in the correct way—they are misaligned. When the teeth are misaligned, they cannot provide the support the muscles in the face need for chewing and swallowing. These muscles are then forced into a strained position, resulting in pain throughout the face, head, arms, shoulders, and back. Although a person may have beautiful teeth or had orthodontics to line the teeth up for aesthetic reasons, the muscles and joints may not be comfortable.

The TMJ is made up of the temporalis, medial pterygoid, lateral pterygoid and the masseter muscles. All of these muscles must be balanced with one another to efficiently and effectively create the chewing action. An imbalance by any one muscle can pull the whole jaw out of alignment and cause the temporomandibular joint to malfunction. Initially, the malfunction may not even be noticeable. Over time, however, the misaligned jaw bone will begin wearing away at the various aspects of the joint.



As far as communicative, there is perhaps no more effective way to communicate than through touch – in fact, touch produces a series of neural, glandular, muscular and mental changes that we interpret as emotion.

Psychologically, touch provides reassurance and comfort and aids in the development of self-identity and self-esteem.



Lastly, socially, research has linked the quality of touch experiences to competence in interpersonal relationships. The ability to trust others, and understand the needs of others, is directly related to touching.

Consider the following:

- Skin-to-skin contact between mother and infant has been shown to benefit the baby's physical development and contributes to a positive attachment relationship between the two. The practice of placing a diaper-clad infant skin-to-skin on the mother is so beneficial that it is now an intervention strategy for premature babies in neonatal intensive care units worldwide.
- A group of Korean infants under the care of an orphanage were provided with an extra 15 minutes of stimulation twice a day, 5 days a week, for 4 weeks. The additional stimulation consisted of auditory (female voice), tactile (massage), and visual (eye-to-eye contact). Compared to the infants who only received regular care, the stimulated orphans gained significantly more weight and had larger increases in body length and head circumference after the 4 week intervention period, as well as at 6 months of age. In addition, the stimulated infants had fewer illnesses and clinic visits.

- Participants in a study examining the effectiveness of therapeutic touch as a treatment for managing pain due to fibromyalgia experienced a significant decrease in pain and reported a significant improvement in quality of life.
- The majority of nursing home residents suffering from dementia like Alzheimer's disease develop behavioral symptoms, such as restlessness, searching and wandering, tapping and banging, pacing and walking, and vocalization. Current treatment involves drugs, but a recent study showed that intervention consisting of therapeutic touch significantly reduces these behavioral symptoms. Impressive is that the therapeutic touch employed in the study was only provided twice per day, for three days. Each therapeutic intervention lasted only 5-7 minutes.

Despite the fact that a majority of people believe it takes mere seconds to make a meaningful connection through touch, 15 per cent of us go three or more days without touching a single person. And one in four of us spend less than one minute per day engaging in touch (this despite the fact that, on average, we spend over half an hour per day engaging in impersonal, electronic communication).



One lesson from a four-year-old girl reveals the importance of touch. After discovering the story of the "Three Little Pigs," she requested her father to read it night after night. Her father, weary of reading the same story each evening, tape recorded it and taught his little girl how to turn the machine on and off, including playback. This approach worked, but only for a few nights. When his daughter asked him to read

Client Testimonials

LINDA K. FROM YORK SAYS...

After spending thirty-five years with small children and sitting in chairs designed for their bodies, not mine, my muscles were in revolt. I had headaches almost daily, starting in the back of my neck. I take a prescription drug almost daily to get relief. I just thought it was "something I had to live with." Then my daughter got me a gift certificate to R&R Massages of York. I assumed that I would get a therapeutic massage, as I had at other salons over the years. When I met Kevin he asked me if I had any "problems" that I'd like addressed. I casually mentioned my neck strain and headaches (thinking there's really no cure for it). He concentrated on those muscles in my neck, back, and chest. Through Myofascial Release techniques, my muscles began to stretch and relax. I noticed a difference after my first massage. For a few days I was pain free. Slowly, however, the strain returned. I had more massages, and each time, I was pain free for a longer period (I went every two or three weeks, usually). After four or five times, I could go the entire time between massages without pain and therefore, medication. I felt like a new person. I will continue with massage therapy because it has changed the way I feel everyday. Once in a while I will do a task that keeps me in a "bent" position for hours (sewing, gardening, etc.) and will notice that the muscles become tense again. That's when I can't wait to return to Kevin's office and have those muscles respond to a session of Medical Massage. I truly can't believe the difference it has made in my life.

AMY R. FROM YORK SAYS....

Imagine you are 32 and pregnant, you just moved into new house, and the baby is on the way. Life is good, right? Now, fast forward 2 years, you are having difficulty going up the steps and the joke is if you've fallen, you've "pulled an Amy" because your knees are looking like a 5 year old who has fallen off her bike.

Now, I'm thinking that I'm out of shape because I haven't been to gym in a few years. So, I called my friend who is a personal trainer and we started working out 2 days a week and I also took classes at the gym, with this I saw immediate improvement! But she suggested I go to the doctor, just to talk about what is going on. I did, and after several doctors, and several months I ended up at Johns Hopkins where I was told I had Muscular Dystrophy. I thought to myself, what is that, I've heard of it, but I don't really know what it is....

...Fast forward...two years later...I'm dealing with the MD, I'm going to the gym and working out, and for the most part, I'm feeling pretty good. All is good...then I find out that my heart is in atrial fibrillation and that I was at risk for a stroke. Then a month later it happened, I had a massive stroke that put me in the hospital for 2 months. My right side was totally paralyzed. I had significant foot drop in my right foot and I went through extensive rehab, but it was twice as hard for me because of the MD, each day I was confined to a wheelchair the worse it became. I saw many different physical therapists over a year's time, yet none of them gave me much hope.

One day, about a year later a friend of mine suggested I go to see the medical massage therapist that her daughter was seeing. So I did. In August, I made an appointment and that is how I met Kevin Bruck and his staff at R & R Massage Therapy. Kevin is the only one who has given me any hope to returning to a normal life. He has told me that he anticipates that I will walk normally again! I will likely no longer need a cane, or a wheelchair!

I know longer need the wheelchair, my upper body is returning to its normal self, now all I need is my leg to return to "normal". Each week I visit Kevin two times without fail. He is my Hero. I never thought this could happen to me this fast. He has made many predications in my progress and the have all come to fruition. Today, I still walk with a cane in public places; yet where I am comfortable, I do not use it any more. I walk much quicker and steadier as a result of his care. And, I'm going to continue going until I no longer have to use my cane, or, he has done everything he can for me. Kevin and his staff have been an inspiration for me, their positive attitudes are contagious! I have recommended him to those that attend my stroke support group, as well as others; I know he can help many of them!

Kevin and his staff are worth their weight in gold! Kudos to them!

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the story again, her father said, "Now, Janie, you know how to use the tape recorder." To which she responded, "Yes, but I can't sit on its lap."

The need for touch doesn't diminish as we age. In fact, research on adults has proven that touch is essential for physical and emotional well-being: regular touch can lengthen life and cut down on doctor's visits. Touch provides solace, safety, tenderness and soothing.

Feel the need to add more touch to your life? Take advantage of opportunities which exist to increase

touch daily. For example, kiss your spouse when leaving for work, embrace your friends when greeting them, hug your children when they return from school and hold hands with your significant other when you are watching television. Rather than having children sit beside you when you read a story, have them sit in you lap. In fact, one of the "secrets" enjoyed by almost every strong family unit is their high level of touching and intimacy.

Clearly, the importance of touch cannot be underestimated. Applying this knowledge in your closest relationships can make all the difference with your health.



Chew On

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That is why it is important it get your condition diagnosed as soon as you start exhibiting any TMJ symptoms consistently.

The good news is that massage therapy can get in and relax and rebalance those strained face and jaw muscles. Often times, we are able to work externally on the face and get the muscles to release. On occasion, however, it is necessary to

work on the medial pterygoids muscles from inside the mouth. As the tension lets up, the headaches, teeth grinding, etc., will improve and hopefully disappear.

One final thought, if you are suffering from jaw pain on only one side, try rubbing the muscles on the other side. Often times, the side that hurts is the side that is being pulled by the tight muscles on the opposite side. This is just one of the many clues and skills we know that can help you with your TMJ. Come visit us and see what we can do for you.

By Kevin Bruck

Paraffin Wax Therapy

Rehabilitation specialists, massage therapists, and the spa industry have endorsed paraffin therapy for its therapeutic properties. Physicians have long known that paraffin therapy is a veritable way to speed healing and soothe muscle and joint pain. In fact, the healing qualities of paraffin wax therapy have been known for centuries. In modern times, paraffin therapy is quite common and widely used to aid in the treatment of conditions such as arthritis, fibromyalgia, stiff joints, or overworked/fatigued muscles, Paraffin therapy is also widely used in the treatment of sports related injuries and other conditions where heat therapy and exercise therapy are needed. One of the overlooked benefits of paraffin therapy is that it soothes and moisturizes the skin, opens pores, increases circulation, and promotes a sense of calm in the patient. Paraffin therapy is now available at R&R Massages. (Must be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance to give us time to prepare the hot wax

