

## Massage Therapy for Stress Relief and Much More

Experts describe massage tips you can try on yourself to ease headaches, back pain, and to help you relax.

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WebMD Feature

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Few sensual experiences rival a full-body massage for pleasure and stress relief -- at least among those things you can talk about in front of the children at the dinner table. Word on the health benefits of [massage therapy](#) for [stress relief](#) has spread. In 2006, 39 million Americans -- one in six adults -- had at least one massage, according to a nationwide survey by the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA).

"Americans are looking to massage for much more than just relaxation," says Mary Beth Braun, President of the AMTA. "Massage therapy can be effective for a variety of conditions, including [arthritis](#), [lower back pain](#), insomnia, [headaches](#), anxiety, circulatory problems, and recovery from a sports injury."

When you can't get to a masseuse, you can still reap many of the benefits of this age-old healing practice -- with your own hands. WebMD consulted several massage experts to find these simple, self-massage techniques that incorporate the best soothing rubs and pressure-point applications that massage has to offer.

Try them on yourself -- or someone you love -- throughout the day to boost your energy and increase concentration. You can also use them at night to relax and get a good night's sleep. You'll find the benefits of massage therapy for stress relief are only the beginning.

### Massage Therapy to Relieve Tired Eyes

"This one is great for tired eyes from staring at the computer -- it brings circulation to the area and relieves sinus pressure, eye strain, and headaches," says Dale Grust, President of the New York Chapter of the American Massage Therapy Association and a licensed massage therapist in New Paltz, N.Y., for 23 years.

- Close your eyes. Place your thumbs under your eyebrows, starting at the inside corner of each eye socket. Press and gently move the thumbs in tiny circles, working slowly towards the outsides of your eyebrows and continuing this movement all around your eyes, ending back at the bridge of your nose.
- Repeat this several times, spending a little extra time at the indentation of the inner eye socket, where the bridge of the nose meets the ridge of the eyebrows - an especially tender point on many people.

### Massage Therapy to Ease Headaches and Tension

- Start by placing your thumbs on your cheekbones close to your ears, and use your fingertips to gently apply pressure and rub the temples (the soft spot between the corner of your eye and your ear).
- Using very firm pressure and a tiny circular motion, gradually move your fingers up along your hairline until they meet in the middle of your forehead, massaging your entire forehead and scalp as you inch along.

### Massage Therapy to Relax the Hands

Here are several moves that will relieve the strain from pounding the keyboard all day.

- Stretch your hands and fingers out. Rub each finger from the base to the tip, gently pulling and twisting each finger as you go.

- Next, rest your left hand, palm upward, on your lap. Squeeze the fleshy part of your palm between your right thumb and index finger, moving from your wrist to the base of your thumb.
- Now squeeze that web between your left index finger and thumb several times, looking for any tender points.
- Then rub the entire palm with your right thumb, applying firm pressure and using gliding strokes from the wrist to the base of each finger.
- Repeat this process on your right hand.

"Massaging the hands is not only great for the hands but can help to relieve headaches as well," Grust says. The hands, like the feet, contain reflexology points that correspond to the entire body, including the head, neck, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and sinuses.

### **Massage Therapy to Relieve Neck Tension**

- While you are sitting there at the computer, mold your hands over your shoulders. Exhale, letting your head drop back as you slowly squeeze your fingers towards your palms, gliding up the muscles of your back and shoulders towards your neck.
- Now, rest your elbows on your desk, allowing your head to drop forward slightly. Massage your neck from your shoulders to the base of your skull using your fingertips to make small deep circles into the muscles on either side of your spine.
- Place both hands on the back of your head, interlacing the fingers. Drop your head forward and allow the weight of your elbows to pull your head gently down, stretching the muscles of your neck and those that run down your back.

### **Massage Therapy to Loosen Tight Shoulders**

You will need a tennis ball or solid rubber ball for this one. "Once I was desperate and couldn't find a ball, so I used an apple," Grust says. "It felt amazing, but the apple took a beating."

- Stand 18 inches from the wall, with your feet hip distance apart. Go into a partial squat with your buttocks against the wall.
- Lean forward, placing the ball behind your back at the top of your shoulder.
- Slowly stand up -- an inch at a time -- pressing against the wall and letting the ball roll slowly down the muscles along the side of your spine, stopping when you find a tender point and waiting for the pain to subside.
- Reverse the process, slowing sitting down into a squat, and allowing the ball to move back up to the top of your shoulder muscle.
- Now switch sides, moving the ball to the other side of your body and repeat the same slow massage.

Not only will you be releasing the tension from your shoulders, but you will be developing strong leg muscles at the same time.

### **Massage Therapy to Release the Lower Back**

- Stand up and put your hands on your waist, with your thumbs behind you and fingers facing forward.
- Gently press your thumbs into the muscles at either side of the spine -- but be careful not to press on the spine itself.

- Keep your thumbs pressed in while you move in a very tiny motion -- up, down, and around in a tiny circle. Spend extra time where you find a tender point - making sure not to cause pain.
- Move your thumbs gradually, an inch at a time, up either side of the spine as far as your hands can comfortably reach. Then gradually move back down your back and press on the bony surface of the sacrum.

### **Massage Therapy to Soothe Tired Feet**

- Bring your left foot onto the seat of your chair so you can see your instep. Using your right thumb, apply very firm pressure along the side of your foot, working from the heel to the big toe. Walk your thumb across the ridge where the toes meet the ball of your foot. When you get to the small toe, use your thumb and index finger to squeeze and twist along the entire surface of the toe. Work each toe individually until you get back to the large toe. Take all of your toes in one hand and stretch them back and forth, bending and flexing.
- While supporting the top of your left foot with your left hand, use the knuckles of your right hand to apply deep pressure to the entire surface of the bottom of your foot, working from the heel to the toes and back down.
- Stretch your toes, flex and extend your feet, and do a few ankle rotations.

Repeat the entire process on the right foot

### **Keep in Mind Before You Start**

With all of these exercises, remember, you never want to cause yourself pain -- but you do want to reach the area that is tender, because that is where the tension is. Always stretch the muscle out after massaging the area.

"If these moves do not ease your pain, contact your doctor to rule out any underlying medical problem," says massage therapist Dale Grust. "Never substitute self massage for proper medical treatment."

And enjoy.