

Touch Therapy

by Winston J. Craig

During the festive holiday season, we strive to make contact with special people. With cell phones, text messaging and e-mails, it has become so much easier to keep in contact with friends and family. But in today's world of computerized technology are we really connecting effectively? Do we truly reach out and touch someone?

Touch is a very fundamental human need. Children crave it, teenagers want it and adults thrive on it. The skin is the most sensitive of our organs. It facilitates real communication between individuals. Infants and children who suffer from a deprivation of touch normally experience behavioral abnormalities later in life. Children demand the security and reassurance of a parent's hand when they enter an unfamiliar place that seems dark or threatening. An affirming pat on the back or a hug of appreciation has helped many a friend or family member feel connected. In the cancer world, tumor cells grow bizarre when they fail to recognize adjoining cells touching them.

In a recent study, the growth, mental development and sleep patterns of normal infants were significantly improved by receiving regular skin-to-skin touching from their parents at least two to three times a day. The earlier in their life they received the therapeutic touch, the better was their development. Touch therapy also facilitates the physiological and behavioral well-being of preterm infants, such as improved coordination in sucking and swallowing. Maternal massage therapy to premature infants facilitated weight gain and decreased the length of hospital stay.

In the West, the medical system has been viewed by some as cold and detached, replete with machines and technology. Health practitioners are now realizing the importance that touch can play in the healing process. Some large cancer centers in the U.S. have started to utilize massage therapy to improve the quality of sleep, reduce fatigue, pain, anxiety and nausea. Massage may increase the levels of lymphocytes and natural killer cells.

Massage is a practice that dates back thousands of years. Ancient Greek, Roman, Chinese and Egyptian writings make reference to massage. Today, part of the effectiveness of complementary medical practices, such as massage and hydrotherapy, depends upon the therapeutic touch of the caregiver. Massage is utilized for a variety of reasons—to relieve pain, rehabilitate sports injuries, reduce stress, increase relaxation, treat chronic low-back pain and improve the quality of life.

When Christ healed the sick and needy, He often touched them in a unique way. For the blind man, Jesus made clay and placed it upon his eyes. He put His fingers in the ears of a deaf man, and touched his tongue. He held children close in His arms as He blessed them. He touched the lepers with healing and dignity. The Master's touch was powerful—it provided genuine healing.

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