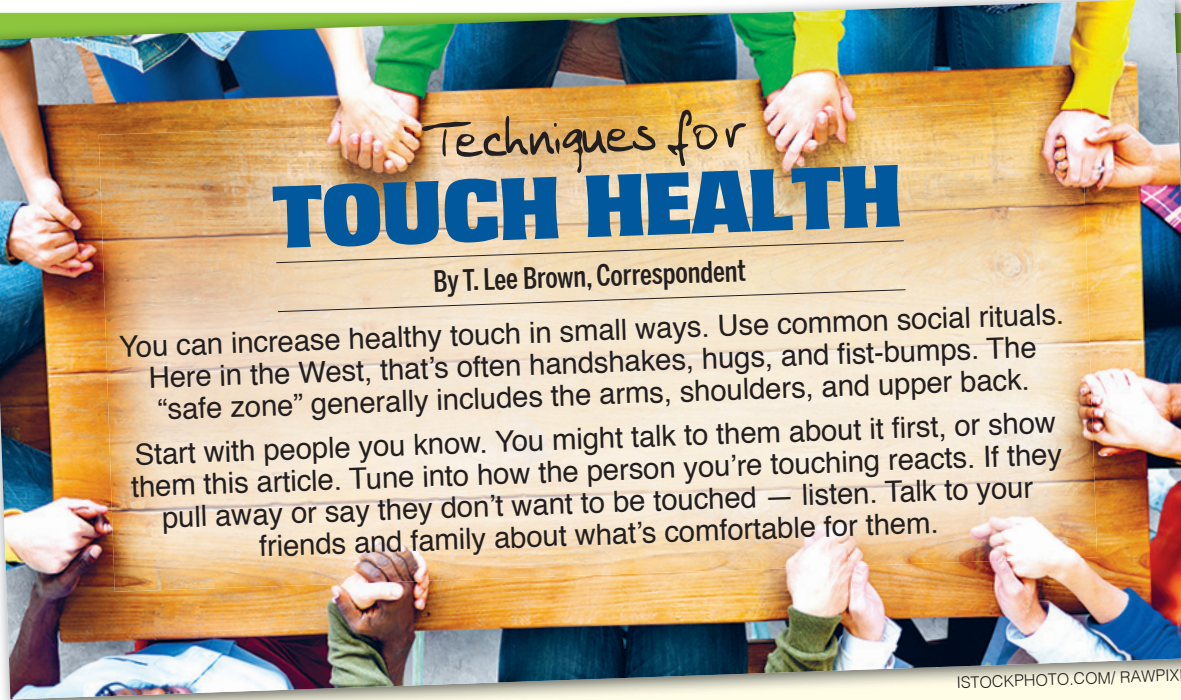




Techniques for TOUCH HEALTH

By T. Lee Brown, Correspondent

You can increase healthy touch in small ways. Use common social rituals. Here in the West, that's often handshakes, hugs, and fist-bumps. The "safe zone" generally includes the arms, shoulders, and upper back. Start with people you know. You might talk to them about it first, or show them this article. Tune into how the person you're touching reacts. If they pull away or say they don't want to be touched — listen. Talk to your friends and family about what's comfortable for them.

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FOR ALL AGES & GENDERS

Hello & Goodbye Try a hug whenever someone leaves or enters the house. When you run into a friend, see if they're comfortable with a handshake-backslap combo, shoulder-hug, or side-hug.

The Good Handshake The average person shakes hands 15,000 times in their lifetime. Professor Geoffrey Beattie offers advice: Wipe off your hand, meet the other person's hand halfway, then grip firmly but not too tightly. Make eye contact, and hold 2-3 seconds max. More at tinyurl.com/nugget-handshake.

At the Table Hold hands around the table before you eat. It's a good time to express gratitude or say grace. Hands should be clean, dry, and not squeezing tightly. Bonus: kids who have family dinner regularly are less likely to use drugs or alcohol and are more likely to do well in school.

Get Outside Touching plastic keyboards, cash registers, and phones all day dulls the senses. Wake them back up. Rake pine needles. Garden. Feel sun and wind on your skin. Take a quiet walk; stop to

six deep, slow breaths together. This builds connection; your heartbeats may even synch up! Bonus points for doing this in front of the kids.

When Someone's Upset Is a friend or loved one distressed or grieving? Sit down and listen to their story. Let them talk without rushing to solve their problem or stop them from displaying their emotions. Try a pat on their hand or lightly press their forearm. If they pull back, don't be insulted. They may not be ready for comforting touch right now.

Healing Touch Boost your immune system and relieve aches and pains: Enjoy the benefits of professional healing touch on a regular basis. Try a Licensed Massage Therapy or Strain-Counterstrain PT appointment at Green Ridge Physical Therapy (greenridgept.com). If your appointment is in response to pain, your insurance may cover it. Feeling luxurious? Book a Swedish massage at Shibui Spa (shibuispa.com).

After an Injury When a family member gets hurt, ask if you can help. If yes, help with their injury and let them feel safe and protected. If no, don't take it

touch soil, tree bark, plants, and rocks.

S i x - B r e a t h H u g Ask your partner to try this once or twice a day. Hold e a c h o t h e r , non-sexually, and breathe

personally. Some people hate to be hovered over following an injury. Give them space.

HELPING BOYS & YOUNG MEN

Get Rough Let your kids play the old-fashioned way. Roughhousing, horseplay, and wrestling bring positive neurological and emotional results. Talk to other parents and educators about easing up on "safety" rules that are too strict.

Masculine Media Take in movies, books, and TV shows together. Then talk about the characters. Kids learn a limited version of masculinity from superhero movies, porn, comic books, and Westerns. Make sure they see and talk about a wide variety of role models.

Nature & the Animal World A lack of natural touch rewires how our brains and nervous systems develop (or fail to). Make sure kids get plenty of time outdoors, doing chores or playing with natural objects. Indoors, try nature-based craft projects. Encourage kids to be responsible pet owners, cuddling and grooming. Try a School-Day-Off camp at Wildheart (wildheartnatureschool.com).

Encourage Boys Avoid reprimanding a boy or young adult who wants to be held, soothed, or hugged when he's in pain — physical or emotional. Don't sigh or give him a grumpy look, either. His long-term health may be on the line.

Get Smart About Screens Digital device use and screen time deprive children of the real-life human interaction they need. Without that warmth and touch, their brains don't develop properly. In experiments, primates actually died from lack of touch. Research links excessive screen time to depression, anxiety, and a soaring suicide rate among youth.

Provide an Example Make sure kids and grandkids see you — their confident, masculine elder — showing affection to people of all genders. Let them see you're not afraid to touch or be touched, appropriately and with consent.

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