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Massage: Class teaches techniques

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lax, and you're going to have somebody else take care of you and kind of tend to you — that's going to help somebody relax."

Although the going rate for this relaxing experience is as much as \$40 to \$50, anyone can give and receive a massage for free. It doesn't take a licensed professional to give a stellar back rub, Hanks and Cogan say.

"Don't get caught up in thinking there are all these different patterns you have to follow," Cogan says. "For the most part, people are going to respond positively to any caring touch."

The key to a successful massage, she says, is to make sure both the giver and the receiver are in a comfortable position. Otherwise, the giver may tire more quickly, and the receiver will find it difficult to relax.

Cogan added that the receiver also needs to be an active participant in the massage.

"People need to learn that to a good extent, you create your own stress, and you can also create your own relaxation," she explains. "You're the only one who can relax yourself. If you're tense and you're keeping yourself tense, I'm not going to be able to relax you."

One way to help the receiver relax before the massage is to have the person concentrate on breathing deeply in a controlled breathing pattern. "That's going to take them into a more relaxed state," Cogan says.

The next step is to apply a lubricant to the area of the massage. Cogan recommends using massage oil or hand cream "to create a gliding surface." Stores such as Bath & Body Works sell massage oils in a variety of scents. Uncommon Scents, located at Fifth Street Public Market, sells a basic, unscented massage oil and has 70 different scents to mix it with, and customers can create their own blends.

"The best tool you have is your fingers and hands. That way, you can feel what's going on with the skin. When you're using a tool, you don't have those nerves to tell you."

Byron Hanks

LCC massage instructor

Once the massage has begun, there are several ways the muscles can be rubbed. Rubbing a muscle longitudinally, along its length, will help stretch it; Cogan suggests using one hand as an anchor and pushing away from it with the other, or using both hands to push in opposite directions. The other way to rub is across the muscle, perpendicular to the direction it runs.

"Both ways are equally effective," Cogan says. "In fact, for a good massage you need a combination of both."

Thumbs and fingertips can be used to work a knotted muscle, but Cogan recommends also using knuckles, elbows and body weight. This will not only vary the amount of pressure used, but it will keep the giver from tiring too quickly.

Cogan added that someone who tires in the middle of a massage can take a break and have the receiver concentrate on breathing; however, she says, the hands should not be removed until the massage is finished.

"You should maintain contact and just vary the amount of pressure you're using," she says. "If the person's nervous system gets a static impulse, it's comfortable, but if you keep breaking contact and initiating it, it's more annoying."

Using massage tools can pre-

vent the giver from tiring, as well. The Happy Massager, a large wooden ball with four dowels, or "legs," attached to smaller wooden balls, is one of the more popular of a wide variety of implements designed to make massage easier and less tiring. Held by the large ball, the Happy Massager can be used to knead tense muscles without straining the hand.

Although tools such as the Happy Massager increase the giver's endurance and can help prevent long-term problems such as carpal tunnel syndrome, Hanks says such tools removes the giver's sense of how the muscle and skin are reacting.

"The best tool you have is your fingers and hands," he says. "That way, you can feel what's going on with the skin. When you're using a tool, you don't have those nerves to tell you."

Those who want to formally learn some basic massage techniques can take one of the two massage classes Hanks teaches at LCC. One class is open to individuals, while the other is specifically for couples.

"In the general class they're all strangers," he says. "The hardest thing, which the couples class has already overcome, is touching someone else comfortably." However, he says, after a while the hesitation "melts away," and students are able to massage each other without being stiff.

Students learn five basic strokes for massage throughout the term, which they demonstrate on each other for their grade. The classes include no tests or homework and require no memorization. "It's the kind of class you wish you could try in college," Hanks says.

Both classes focus on the massage as a means for relaxation.

"If the person starts drooling, you get a B automatically," he says jokingly. "If it puts them to sleep, that's an A."

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