

THE

MAGIC

OF

TOUCH

Touching and being touched is non-verbal and universal among all mammals.

Massage converts a basic instinct into a skill that brings pleasure to both giver and receiver. Touch is the first sense to develop in humans; the skin and brain develop from the same area in the foetus. Every touch on the skin initiates a mental response. It is the first stimulation of air and touch on their skin at birth that initiates the reflex for babies to take their first breath. It may be the last sense to fade, babies can wither and die without touch. Would older people do the same?

Touch is known as the “Mother Sense”, “Skin on skin”.

It is greatly encouraged by Midwives for the first few weeks to help mothers and their newborn babies form that vital bond. It is a highly developed sense in newborns whose skin area is relatively large and very sensitive. It promotes growth and development. Stimulation of the tactile nerve endings in the skin provides information about the outside world and helps the brain organise its circuitry. During baby massage muscular co-ordination is encouraged and growth hormones flowing from the Pituitary gland increase. Premature infants who are massaged gain weight up to 47% faster and are more alert, active and responsive than non massaged infants of the same original size and condition. They will be more able to tolerate noise and calm themselves, sleep more deeply and have fewer episodes of Apnoea.

Investigations dating back to the 13th century confirm the importance of infant touch when German Emperor Frederick II, curious to know what language children would speak if they were raised without hearing any words at all, decided to conduct a little empirical research. Seizing a number of newborns from their parents, he gave them to nurses who fed the infants but were forbidden to cuddle or talk to them. The babies never learned language. They all died before they could talk. Frederick's linguistic experiment was a flop, yet he had unwittingly made an important discovery: tactile and verbal stimulation can be a matter of life and death. Unfortunately, Frederick's findings have been inadvertently confirmed many times since then. In Romania during the early 1990's, when thousands of infants were housed in Orphanages, some of them virtually left alone in their cribs for two years, were found to be severely impaired.

Such tragedies affirm what we instinctively know;  
That touch is a primal need as necessary for growth as food clothing or shelter. From the nuzzles and caresses between mother and infant that form the foundation of the self, to the holding of hands between a son and his dying father that allows the final letting go, touch is our most intimate and powerful form of communication.

In Victorian times it was widely believed that children and animals only showed affection because you feed them. Psychologist Harry F. Harlow's 'Monkey Love Experiments' in the 1950s that showed otherwise. The monkey experiments had powerful implications for any and all separations of mothers and infants.

Harlow separated infant monkeys from their mothers a few hours after birth then arranged for the surrogate monkeys to be 'raised' by two kinds of surrogate monkey mothers, both were made out of wire mesh. One was bare and dispensed milk from a bottle. The other was covered in a soft terry cloth and had no milk. Harlow's first observation was that the monkeys that had a choice of mother spent far more time clinging to the terry cloth surrogates, even when their physical nourishment came from the bottles mounted on the bare wire mothers. This suggested that infant love was no simple response to the physiological needs. Attachment was not primarily about hunger or thirst.

Harlow hypothesized from further experiments were he gave the monkeys no choice, dividing them into two groups. The terry cloth monkeys benefited from a psychological resource, emotional attachment, by providing reassurance and security to infants, cuddling kept normal development on track. He did this by further adapting the experiment, frightening them with loud sounds and strange objects. The terry cloth surrogates made bodily contact with their mothers by rubbing against them and eventually calming down, from this Harlow

theorized that they used their mothers as a 'psychological base of operations', allowing them to remain playful and inquisitive after their initial fright had subsided. In contrast the monkeys raised by the wire mesh surrogates did not retreat to their mothers when scared, instead they threw themselves on the floor, clutched themselves, rocked back and forth and screamed in terror.

As now science is confirming what we knew in our hearts: that, as Psychiatrist Jame Gordon puts it, "**massage is medicine**". Much of this science is generated at the Touch Research Institute, they also collaborate with the Universities of Miami, Duke and Harvard. More than 50 T.R.I studies have shown ,massage to have a positive effect on conditions from colic to hyperactivity and diabetes to migraines - in fact, on every malady T.R,I has studied so far. Massage, it seems, helps asthmatics breathe easier, boosts immune function in HIV positive patients, improves autistic childrens ability to concentrate, lowers anxiety in depressed adolescents and reduces apprehension in burns victims about to undergo a very painful procedure. "I started out thinking it was a bunch of hooey, but I've become a believer." says C. Gillon Ward, medical director of the Jackson Memorials Burn Centre. "I guess there are just some things you can't explain yet."

Massage assists the flow of the Lymphatic system that transports immune cells through the body and removes waste products. It enhances immune function by activating NK cells

(natural killer cells) and lowers levels of stress hormones, cortisol and norepinephrine. It reduces pain perception; massage stimulates the brain's release of endorphin, 'feel good', hormones that also act as pain suppressors and occupies sensory pathways to the brain, 'gating' out some of the pain signals. It also lowers stress hormones by helping to balance the autonomic nervous system by stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system, thus helping promote relaxation and the reduction of stress. Massage increases delta waves (linked with sleep).

America and England are what Anthropologists call 'non-tactile' societies. Psychologist Sidney Jouard observed rates of casual touch among couples in cafes around the world. He reported the highest rate in Puerto Rico, at a rate of 180 times per hour. One of the lowest rates found was in the U.S, at just 2 times per hour.

Psychologist T.Field from the T.R.I discovered that French parents and children touch each other three times more frequently than their American counterparts. At McDonalds restaurants in Paris and Miami, Field found that French adolescents demonstrate significantly more casual touching such as leaning on a friend or putting an arm around another's shoulder. American teenagers were more likely to fiddle with their rings, crack their knuckles and engage in forms of self-stimulation. Cultures that show more physical affection towards infants and children on the whole tend to have lower rates of adult violence.