

talk about touch

WITH MARY ANN FOSTER AND MARY KATHLEEN ROSE

FLUSHING TOXIC MYTHS



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MARY KATHLEEN ROSE: Some time ago I observed a massage therapist giving seated massage at a health food store. As he worked on his client's neck, she suddenly slumped down in the chair and her arms fell limp. The startled therapist attempted to catch his fainting client, but she dropped onto the floor. Panicked, he called her name. There was no response. After a few, long moments she began to stir.

MARY ANN FOSTER: Whoaaaaa. Sounds intense! It must have been scary for that poor woman. What happened?

MKR: That's what the disoriented woman asked when she finally opened her eyes. The therapist, relieved that the client was talking, explained that he must have released some toxins while working on her shoulders, causing her reaction.

MAF: When in doubt, massage therapists too often blame those "nasty" toxins for any number of problems: fainting, muscle soreness, nausea, even bounced checks.

MKR: There's no way to know for sure: maybe a sudden drop in blood pressure or a vaso-vagal response. The therapist told her to drink a lot of water to flush out the toxins. Hmm. Recently, a doctor asked me, "Why do massage therapists always tell people to drink a lot of water after a massage?" I asked him what he thought of the explanation that water flushes toxins out of the body. He looked puzzled.

MAF: On a parallel note, many people believe that massage flushes lactic acid out of the muscles. I recently did a Google search for "lactic acid myth" and got 31,200 hits. I think it's time we flushed a 100-year-old misconception out of massage education. Lactic acid is not a toxin;

rather, it's a fuel for the muscles that metabolizes within an hour of its production—with or without massage.

MKR: The idea of flushing toxins from the body is interesting. It dates back to the medieval notion that unclean thoughts and actions manifest as disease. Historically, the heroic physician used various methods, including bloodletting, to drain the toxins causing illness out of the body. We now recognize that there are well-designed body mechanisms for detoxification and the maintenance of homeostasis. They involve the intestines, liver, lymph system, and kidneys, which are responsible for the normal elimination of metabolic wastes.

MAF: It's absurd to think that a shot of water or a massage can flush toxins through the body, as though it were a simple plumbing system.

MKR: For massage to gain acceptance in the medical community, we need to take a critical look at the language we use. In a recent workshop I taught, a massage therapist explained that her work was beneficial because it "pushes toxins out through the blood and clears out negative energies." The physical therapist beside her said, "If you talk like that in our hospital, people will think you are crazy."


MAF: It would be honest to say that, while we recognize certain benefits of massage, we still don't have definitive answers. We know that massage can evoke the relaxation response, which in itself promotes healing and reduces stress. We also know that massage can encourage the flow of lymph in the body, which can reduce the discomfort of swelling and edema.


MKR: It would be fair to say that chasing your client around the block would do more to increase his circulation than giving him a massage! Local circulation may increase, but during a relaxing massage, systemic circulation actually slows down, as evidenced by lowered blood pressure, decreased body temperature, and slower respiration.

MAF: Not only does massage trigger parasympathetic responses, thereby encouraging restorative processes in the body, there are also well-documented psychological benefits. Massage can alter mood, alleviating anxiety and depression, which enhances feelings of well-being and safety.

MKR: So why should a massage therapist offer a client a drink of water? Perhaps the client is thirsty. Also, water does hydrate and nourish the body. But most of all, it is a refreshing gesture of hospitality.

MAF: Let's drink to that! **m&b**

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