

# The Power OF TOUCH

A while back I read about a very entrepreneurial woman who opened a touch therapy clinic in NY. This was not a massage clinic, but instead, the therapy consisted of a person just lying fully clothed in a bed with another person holding them (cuddling). This is a non-sexual therapy. And amazingly, the clinic was such a hit, she opened up a whole chain of them in NY.

There might have been a time in history when a business like this (being non-sexual) would never have gotten off the ground. But, with today's increasing prevalence of isolation and touch-deprivation, a therapy like this is almost becoming a necessity. Touch deprivation is also known as skin hunger - when your skin literally hungers for the touch of another human being, to feel connected, accepted and whole.

What happens when we are touched, and why is this so important to us? The largest organ of our body (our skin) has receptors connected to our nervous system and brain, and when we are touched, our brain immediately receives a wealth of information. There are the pain and heat receptors that warn us of danger. And, depending on the situation, those receptors also receive messages of comfort, love, care, reassurance and affection.

This connection associated with touch is highly beneficial for lowering stress, anxiety, cortisol, blood pressure, and in hyperactive children it can help them to feel more calm and settled.

The healing power of touch has been demonstrated by numerous studies. In people with asthma their lung functions improved and asthma attacks decreased. In people with HIV immune cell counts improved. In a breast cancer study natural killer cells increased which is good, because they kill cancer cells. Orphaned babies who are deprived of touch -

whether it be a mother's touch or a caregiver's touch - do not thrive. They do not develop as well physically, mentally or emotionally as children who are not deprived of touch (being held and shown affection). Others include elderly who enjoy better health when touched regularly, and patients who recover from their illnesses more quickly when they are touched often.

What of adults whose connections are primarily social media, or who are isolated for any number of reasons? Imagine a person never receiving the receptor messages of love, comfort, support or affection. This kind of deprivation can lead to a host of physical and emotional dysfunctions. More people than ever before are filling prescriptions for depression or anxiety. This is not to say that getting regular massages will cure one of depression or anxiety. However, many studies have shown massage to help with depression - especially if one has skin hunger.

In addition to receiving hugs and nurturing touch, by reaching out to others who are alone or in need and offering them **your** hand to hold, **your** hug of reassurance and **your** pat on the back you provide a feeling of connection, love, support and care to others, as well as yourself.

The same holds true when showing affection to your family pet. Petting an animal can lower our blood pressure as well as theirs, and releases endorphins that make us happy.

While technology can be beneficial in so many ways, it can never replace the human touch - the human connection. ♦