

Neck pain

Ten neck massages over 10 weeks. Sound good? **People with chronic neck pain reported a 55 percent improvement** after this regimen, according to a 2009 study in the *Clinical Journal of Pain*. They even scored 39 percent better on the worst-sounding test ever, the Neck Disability Index. (It assesses the pain's impact.)

Depression

Take your pick: Swedish, shiatsu, and other massage types may ease depression, a 2010 meta-analysis in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* found. How? **Massages reduce stress hormone levels, heart rate, and blood pressure, and boost mood and relaxation** by triggering the release of oxytocin and serotonin.

High blood pressure

A study in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* found that **after people with normal blood pressure had deep-tissue massage for 45 to 60 minutes, their BPs fell**—specifically, by an average of 10.4 millimeters of mercury (mm/Hg) systolic, and 5.3 mm/Hg diastolic.

Lower-back pain

Back problems can be complex. One solution is simple: **Common massage techniques can help you relax, and trigger an endorphin release that raises your threshold for pain.** And that might help people with all sorts of lower-back pain, notes a 2009 meta-analysis in the journal *Spine*.

Constipation

Would you like an abdominal massage with that laxative? Yes, you would: A 2009 Swedish study found that **people who received a massage along with traditional constipation treatment felt significantly better** than those who stuck with just laxatives.

Fix It with Massage

MASSAGES ARE MORE THAN JUST INDULGENCES. THEY'RE PROVEN HEALTH AND MOOD TREATMENTS

Athletic performance

"Musculotendinous" massages target muscle-tendon junctions, and a 2010 study in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* found that **even a 30-second round improved hip-flexor range of motion.** Try it: Find where muscle meets tendon just behind and above your knee, and rub the spot in small circles with your thumb.

Stress

You don't need a full-body rubdown to feel good. In a 2010 study from Sweden, **one 80-minute hand-and-foot massage significantly lowered people's heart rates, cortisol levels, and insulin levels**—all of which help lower stress.

THE WORLD OF HURT by Travis Stork, M.D.



Travis Stork, M.D., is an ER physician and host of TV's *The Doctors*.

Q How nasty does my acid reflux have to be for me to need more than antacids?

Ben, Sunrise, FL

If you feel heartburn more often than, say, once a week, take it seriously. That burn is your esophageal tissue literally sizzling from acid, and can lead to cancer. If you're popping antacids like Tic Tacs, see your

doctor for some other intervention, such as acid suppressors or diet changes. (Read this issue's *Man to Man* for more about acid reflux.) Heart disease can masquerade as heartburn, so don't ignore it.

THE CONCERT WAS 3 DAYS AGO, AND MY EARS ARE STILL RINGING. PROBLEM?

Mark, Brooklyn, NY

You've suffered permanent hearing loss, Mark. The ringing should eventually subside, but hearing loss is always cumulative. Even a one-time exposure to a loud noise can damage you long-term. Anything over 85 decibels can cause harm, and a rock concert tops 110 decibels—for 2 hours.