

Women's Era

Message IN THE Massage

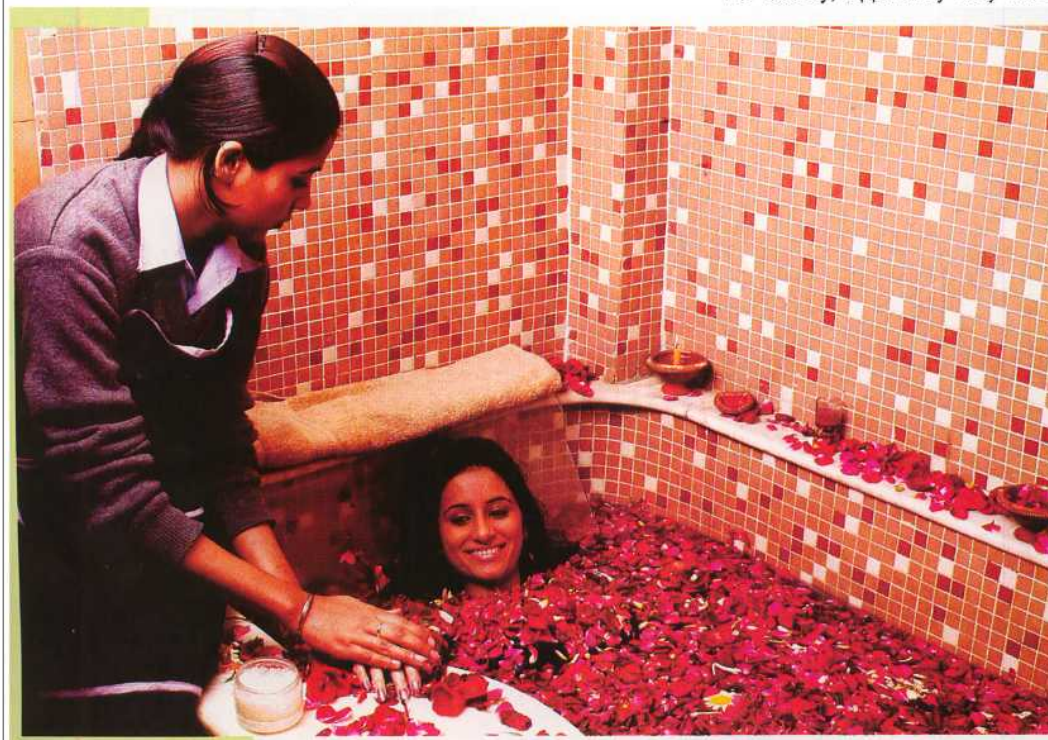
A literally sensational way to pre-empt problems of health and overcome fatigue is a good massage. By Maharaaj K. Koul

ne of the most important regimens for anti-ageing is massage. While a vigorous workout is the new mantra for fitness, a gentle massage can smoothen away stress, fatigue and even cure some ailments. Massage has been part of our lives.

Whether it is backache or post-natal care, in India, we resort to massage.

Just the idea of having your muscles kneaded, prodded and beaten into total relaxation is half way to achieving *nirvana*. Massages are a universal practice with every culture boasting of their own home-bred techniques.

Cleopatra, apart from her Anthony and Caesar, is best known for her nose and the fatal asp. But here we must forget that part of history and concentrate on her donkey. Cleopatra, known as she was throughout her part of the world for her beauty, apparently may have



Women's Era

been the first heroine in history to hold on to her beauty through a simple method: massage. That she used donkey's milk for a massage is just for the records, but for historians such trivia makes great reading!

The facts of the case are simple — from Cleopatra to modern times, the massage has played a major role in preserving human health. And, for today's health-conscious generation, this aspect of therapy requires some serious probing. The regular massages that Cleopatra enjoyed had anti-ageing effects and helped her retain her youthful buoyancy. A massage helps in the proper circulation of blood which relaxes and tones the muscles, which quantifies its anti-ageing properties.

The encyclopaedia describes the massage as "a systematic and scientific manipulation of body tissues performed with the hands for therapeutic effect on the nervous and muscular system and on systematic circulation." The word "massage" has different meanings for different people — some seek pleasure in it, others relief from pain. Massage today is seen as a panacea for all ills — from epilepsy to sinusitis to sprained joints and ligaments. Surprisingly, several scientific studies have been carried out to verify or demolish the claims of those who swear by it. This cure for many ill thus keeps you sprightly and youthfully fit.

Massage, say its practitioners, does the following to you:

- Dilates blood vessels, improves circulation and relieves congestion.
- Increases the number of red blood cells, especially in cases of anaemia.
- Acts as a mechanical cleanser, pushing along the lymph and hastening the elimination of wastes and toxic debris.
- Relaxes muscle spasms and relieves tension.
- Improves muscle tone.
- May have a sedative or stimulating effect, depending on the type and length of the massage.

Despite the sleazy image that's rubbing off from massage parlours, a professional massage by qualified practitioners is very much a part of a health and fitness industry. Scientific evidence suggests that both a manual and mechanical massage can make a difference to your physical state of well-being.

A massage eases tension with varying pressure applied at different pressure points on the body and promotes flexibility. You end up with a general feeling of relaxation and comfort.

The massage has been a therapeutic modality in all cultures since early civilisation and has a long tradition of use, especially in the sporting context. The mushrooming of parlours at almost every street corner testify to the popularity of massage.

Says the Manager, Public relations, Oberoi Grand Hotel, Kolkata: "There seems to be a craze among our guests for massage therapy at our health club. We have professional masseurs, separate for males and females. Our guests from the West seem to make a beeline for masseurs. Lately, Indians too are chipping in."

A massage is no longer a luxury, but an essential part of healthy living. Usually defined as a treatment of the superficial parts of the body by rubbing, stroking or slapping, massage has many variations and new methods are created every other day.

Dr Isaac Mathai, known for his holistic treatment and celebrity clientele like Sarah Fergusson, Tina Turner and Sting among others, says, "A good massage improves circulation, relaxes taut muscles, improves the flow of energy within the body and releases blockages, thereby

A massage eases tension. You'll also seek pleasure in it besides a general tiding relaxation and comfort!

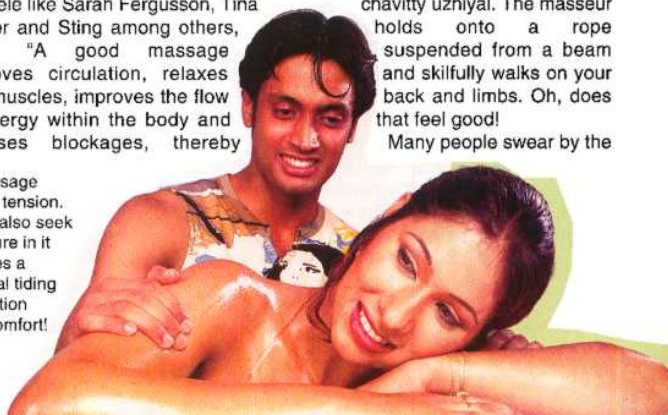
keeping the energy channels open. The oil chosen for the massage is selected as per the body type and need."

Dr Arun Bhattacharya, former head, physical education, Kalyani University, West Bengal says, "Massage basically helps to tone up the muscle fibres and peak them for action. Massage basically has these roles: preventive, curative and rehabilitative, all explanatory." Dr Bhattacharya believes that a massage by hand is most effective, whereas gadgets at times can be counterproductive.

For thousands of years we have known the therapeutic value of the massage. It requires at most a bit of warm oil, has no side-effects and does tight, aching muscles a world of good. In other words, the gentle soothing feeling you get when someone massages your muscles means that pain messages don't get through to the brain.

There are six types of massage:

- o Friction massage involving rubbing the skin firmly with fingers;
 - o Effleurage means soothing, stroking movements with the flat of the hand;
 - o Toptement is massage by means of slapping the skin to stimulate it;
 - o Petrissage means kneading and rolling the skin; and
 - o Vibration massage involves a delicate tapping and circling of the skin.
- o You will have to go to Kerala to experience type number six. This is chavitty uzhiyal. The masseur holds onto a rope suspended from a beam and skilfully walks on your back and limbs. Oh, does that feel good! Many people swear by the



Women's Era

Kerala system of massage. The secret of a good massage lies in the oil used and the expertise of the masseur. The *sirolepa* massage, for instance, is a massage from the head to the toe which increases blood circulation.

While the fingers twist and turn the fatigue out of your muscles, the names of the massages can, quite literally, be tongue-twisters. *Uzhichil* and *pizhichil* are the two main massaging techniques used in the Kerala system of massage. They are either used separately or together as a cure for ailments like rheumatism, arthritis, hypertension, lumbago, spondylitis and slipped disc. It is known to benefit polio patients too. *Uzhichil* uses a limited quantity of oil, while *pizhichil* massage requires litres of oil. There are all types of massages — soft, hard, new-age, scented candle. Make your choice. The professional massages are broadly divided into two: The soft massage is where slight pressure is applied to certain points in the body. It includes the aroma massage, circulatory massage, acupressure massage, Thai massage and water massage. All of them are basically a passive type of massage to soothe and relax. On the other hand, the hard massage is therapeutic in nature and a lot of pressure is applied to hurting points in the body. It includes the Chinese pressure massage, trigger point massage and shiatsu massage. Unlike many massage techniques which began in the East, there are just a few Western styles. One such was developed by a Swedish gymnast, Per Henrik Ling, in the 19th century. Others include osteopathy developed by an American, Dr Andrew still; Rolfing devised by American, Dr Ida Rolf, and the Bowen technique designed by an Australian, Tom Bowen.

Several Ayurvedic centres in our

country also offer special massages and wraps which are meant for a number of ailments. According to Gita Ramesh of Kairali Ayurvedic Health Club, Delhi, "Massage with Ayurvedic medicated oils is also preventive medicine. It helps in toning up the circulation and in rejuvenation of the body." This special treatment of oil massage has been practised in India for centuries in accordance with the works of Charaka and Sushrut. Interestingly, these massages are done on wooden beds carved to match body contours.



Several Ayurvedic centres in our country also offer special massages and wraps which are meant for a number of ailments.

Depending on the type of massage and the place where you are getting it done, prices vary widely. Ideally, the soft massages cost anything between Rs 500 and Rs 3,000. Hard massages start at Rs 1,000. Costs go up in 5-star hotels. And feel diamonds being scrubbed into your skin, caviar melt on your cheeks and grated apple being rubbed on your back. At Le Thermes in Monte Carlo, you can have a diamond powder scrub for \$700, followed by a rose oil massage, or a caviar facial for \$500 to give you that glow. The exotica in spa massages is now unlimited.

It is new-age exotica. The time of an exotic champagne of the sea massage for \$170 in New York, where what you get is a marine mud wrap, followed by a sea sponge exfoliation and Vichy shower to soothe your body. The world of the massage is getting more adventurous.

Ever tried a holistic massage with hot stone therapy? At Delhi's Asian Roots, hot stones are rolled over the body for a soothing effect. Even at Chennai's Spa Vyana and Goa's Spa Aguada, smooth heated lava rocks slathered in rich cocoa butter are rolled on your body for that good feeling. And that'll be \$180, please.

Mira Kulkarni of Forest Essentials Spa near Rishikesh, says, "The most exotic treatments are always natural. Our sugar polish rubdown is a scrub made of golden sugar and organically raised seeds and flowers. It's massaged deep into damp skin for exfoliation and results in better blood circulation, making your skin glow like an infant's. If you want to beat the heat, try a scrub made of cloves, ground rice and compressed oils. It releases blocked energy and makes you feel beautiful." The golden rule of the massage is that it should never be painful. Never let anyone massage a sore or inflamed joint or any bone or bony area or any lump or area of infection or inflammation.

Say massage therapists, for the therapy to be effective:

- Don't use a bed for a massage. It's too soft to give enough support. A mat on the floor is ideal.
- Turn off the overhead light. Bright light falling directly on the face may tense your eye muscles.
- Keep the room warm and free of draught. Nothing destroys a good massage more quickly than physical coldness.
- Use sesame and olive oils, the easiest to wash out of sheets.
- If you are allergic to certain oils, let the therapist know in advance.
- Beware of 'medicated oils', especially those used by footpath masseurs.

The massage is, undoubtedly, the medium. In this day and age when pills and pricks are what the doctor normally prescribes, a soothing massage provides relief from scores of ailments. Just give it a try! 