

Extended Health Care (EHC)

Self-massage: give yourself a "me"-ssage

Try out these simple "me"-ssage methods to soothe pain and tension.

While it may not be as soothing as a full-on massage administered by trained, professional hands, a self-massage can be a quick, effective, and economical way to loosen up stress spots and relieve muscle pain. Or, as Rich Poley, author of *Self-Massage for Athletes*, has described it, "Massage therapy is dining out; self-massage is home-cooking."

Try out these "me"-ssage touches:

- **Scalp:** A scalp massage fits nicely into the morning shower routine. It feels wonderful with soapy lather and it makes for an invigorating start to your day! Spread your fingers apart and tuck your thumbs behind your ears. Knead your fingertips into your scalp, tracing small circles as you move across your head.
- **Eyes:** Don't worry – it's not your eyeballs you'll be massaging here. One way to soothe strained eyes is to first rub your hands together to warm them up and then cup them over your eyes. The base of your palm fits nicely along the curve of your cheekbones as your fingers extend over the top of your forehead. Another eye-easer: Shut your eyes and use your ring fingers to press gently on the point beneath your eyebrows near the bridge of your nose. Press for 5-10 seconds, release, and repeat a few times. Don't forget to wash your hands first before placing them near your eyes.
- **Nose:** The tip of your nose is mostly soft cartilage and won't get much from a massage, but the parts of your nose more connected to your sinuses might. Begin with your fingertips on the bridge of your nose between your eyes and let them slide down and along the tops of your cheekbones.
- **Face:** Boost circulation to your skin by first rubbing your hands together to warm them up. Then lightly press your palms to your forehead, pulling your hands down your face across your cheeks and down to your chin. Press circles on your cheek a few times, as though you were washing your face.
- **Ears:** Tend to take your ears for granted? Too bad: Self-massage can relieve headaches and may help curb cravings and anxiety associated with quitting smoking. Take a 2-minute break to give your ears some TLC: Gently squeeze and rub the outer edge of your ear between your thumb and index finger. Move gradually from the top of the ear down to the earlobe. Tug softly on your earlobe a few times. Repeat as many times as you'd like and switch to the other ear.
- **Jaw:** Even the mellowest among us clench our jaws sometimes. And chewing, talking, resting chin on hand, or holding the mouth open for dental procedures can wear out the jaw. You can rub light circles at the point at which your lower jaw attaches to your skull, near the *temporomandibular joint*. Your jaw may also benefit from massaging wider circles over the *masseter* and *temporalis* muscles. The masseter is the square muscle over your cheekbone, and the temporalis can be found above your ear.

- **Neck:** Modern life is full of ways to strain the neck – leaning in to read small print on your computer or just sitting in a seat all day. Thankfully there are easy ways to relieve some of the strain. Use the heels of your hands to work circles into the taut muscles at the sides of your neck. Change to fingertip pressure to drum down the sides from behind your ears down toward your shoulders.
- **Shoulders:** Quit shouldering the burden of waiting for a professional massage! So much tension can be stored in the muscles of your shoulders, and you can easily release some of it on your own. Just reach an arm across the front of your body and press circles firmly into muscles above the opposite shoulder blade. Switch sides. Ahh, that's nice!
- **Hands:** Relaxation and stress relief go hand-in-hand with this massage. If you'd like, add a dollop of lotion to your hand before beginning to smooth the way. Using the opposite hand, squeeze each finger with circling pressure around the joints from base to tip. Tug gently to stretch each finger. And don't forget the spaces in between! With your palm facing down, stroke your thumb between the tendons on the back of your hand that run down from the fingers. Take each finger between the opposite thumb and index finger and rub small circles from tip to wrist, first on the back of your hand then on the palm. Switch hands and repeat.
- **Belly:** Try this one after a meal to support healthy digestion. Put one hand on top of the other just above your belly button and rub lightly in clockwise circles. Continue for a few minutes, breathing deeply as you go.
- **Torso:** Down low on the sides of your back and nestled beneath the soft flesh above your waistline are your kidneys. Rubbing this area with your fists in quick circles is said to deliver a boost of energy.
- **Legs:** Depending on your size, the legs present a self-massage challenge. With their varied terrain, you'll need to alternate between stroking, kneading, and drumming. Give yourself a strong foundation by resting your foot flat with your knee bent. With one hand on each side of your leg, stroke up from ankle to thigh. When you get up there, knead into the fleshy part of your thigh as if it were dough and then drum the outsides and fronts. Use your fingertips to gently massage circles around your kneecap. Put both hands to work kneading your calf muscle and finish off with broad strokes up and down the leg. Switch legs.
- **Feet:** In terms of self-massage, your feet are a lot like your hands – except they're farther away and potentially harder to reach. Sit in a chair that allows you to comfortably cross one leg onto the opposite knee. First apply some lotion to the tops and soles of your feet. Then grip the fingers of one hand between your toes, much like you would when you hold hands with someone. Lightly tug the toes up as the heel of your hand rubs the top of your foot. This also gives the tendons between your toes a good stretch. At the same time, you can put the thumb of the other hand to work kneading into the sole of your foot. After you've done this for a while, turn your attention to the tops of your feet. Massage your thumbs into the top of the foot in opposing circles.