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Massage Envy Magazine

PLUS

When it comes to nutrition, is your glass half full or half empty?

MassageEnvy.com | FALL 2008

One Massage Envy member tells how regular massage has changed her life **PAGE 10**

4 tips to walk your way to fitness

AN OWNER'S MANUAL FOR THE SKIN YOU'RE IN

with meditation, there's no place like 'om'

that healing touch



## Coffee: A Perk or a Problem?

If you have to have a cup (or two) of coffee each day, you can vouch for java's ability to boost alertness. But coffee also can cause anxiety and heartburn, and caffeine can increase your chance of stroke and heart attack. But then again, coffee may help reduce the risk of contracting Parkinson's disease and type 2 diabetes. So is it OK to hit the corner Starbucks? Sure. But limit yourself to no more than three cups a day.



## Until There's a Cure

If you've been diagnosed with breast cancer or have a friend or relative who's fighting this disease, you know how important support can be during this challenging time. Care and concern can take many forms in helping someone with breast cancer, which is estimated to affect one in eight American women.

To provide the most meaningful assistance, ask them what would be most helpful to them, says Sandi Kafenbaum, counseling coordinator for a statewide breast cancer hot line and support program based in Adelphi, N.Y. Some women may want a friend to accompany them to chemotherapy or doctor visits. Others might prefer to be treated to lunch, a movie or a massage. Even co-workers

can help by pooling and contributing their sick days, she says.

Massage during the course of breast cancer treatment can promote relaxation and provide the benefit of a comforting touch. If you're undergoing treatment, be sure to talk to your doctor about massage before scheduling your next appointment at Massage Envy.

Massage Envy's "Massage for the Cure" allows any client to have the entire cost of a one-hour massage donated to breast cancer education and research. Visit [MassageEnvy.com](http://MassageEnvy.com) and look for the pink ribbon, for information on Massage for the Cure, which has already raised more than \$400,000 for Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

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## Nuke Your Sponge

Microwave ovens are more than a convenient gadget for heating leftovers. They're also a powerful weapon against germs. A two-minute spin in the microwave effectively sterilizes kitchen sponges and scrubbers.

Germs and bacteria that can cause food poisoning flourish in the crannies of sponges but can't survive 120 seconds in the microwave, according to a study published in the *Journal of Environmental Health*.

For best results, set your damp, not dry, sponge sizzling every few days. Remember that it will be hot when it's "cooked," so remove it carefully.



## Q & Ahhh

### Massage Envy experts answer your questions

#### **Q: How often should I receive a massage?**

**A:** The amount of massages a person receives in a month can depend on many things: the type of massage being received, the recommendations of the massage therapist, the physical condition of the client and, of course, time and finances. People receive massages for many reasons. Some are looking for therapy that helps them to de-stress and relax. Some are receiving massage to help relieve the pain and discomfort of a physical condition and some integrate massage into their individual health and wellness regimen.

Massage therapy not only decreases pain and tension in muscles but also has other benefits such as improving posture, promoting a healthy circulatory system, improving flexibility, relieving stress and strengthening the immune system. The effects of massage are cumulative, and scheduling on a regular basis will increase the length of time these benefits are experienced.

For a general recommendation of massage frequency, I would suggest receiving a massage at least twice a month in order to maintain the effects and results from each session. However, even receiving massage once a month will produce great results when scheduled on a regular basis.

—C.G. Funk, Licensed Massage Therapist and Vice President of Industry Relations and Product Development for Massage Envy

Do you have a question about massage therapy for our experts? Contact [info@MassageEnvy.com](mailto:info@MassageEnvy.com). Type "Ask CG" in the subject line.

## A Summer To-Do List

When the days are long, warm and gloriously bright, no one wants to believe that Labor Day and back-to-school sales are just around the corner. Before you reluctantly trade your flip-flops for some sensible shoes, savor what remains of summer by ...

**Splurging on a pedicure.** Your feet will be sandal-ready after a gentle exfoliation and a few coats of polish on your toes. Try colors that are bright (like hot pink) or deep (ruby and crimson) to set off sandals.

**Shopping at the farmers market.** Bring home summer's superstars—sweet corn,

juicy tomatoes and succulent peaches—for a slice-and-eat feast.

Use fresh veggies and herbs to whip up a batch of homemade spaghetti sauce. Freeze it in small servings so you can enjoy a burst of summer anytime.

#### **Capturing picture-perfect times.**

Don't wait for a special event to fill a memory card with photos of family, friends and pets. Use your favorites to create an online photo album, make notecards or round out a photo book of summer memories.





## Ice Is Nice

The secret to treating bumps, strains and bruises lies in an unlikely place: your freezer. Use a bag of frozen veggies as an ice pack to reduce swelling the next time you twist your ankle.

Applied for the first 24 hours after an injury, ice slows blood flow to the area, reduces pain and helps it heal faster, says Mark Till, M.D., an ER physician at Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas.

Elevate the injured area if possible, and apply ice and pressure for 10 minutes, then examine the wound. If it's no longer bleeding and is in an area where the skin won't be stretched or pulled, it will probably heal fine without stitches, Dr. Till says.

A red washcloth filled with ice can be great for kids' injuries, since the blood "vanishes" into it.



## Picnic Pointers

One of summer's delights is a meal enjoyed outdoors, whether it's wine, cheese and a crisp baguette or a barbecue with all the traditional sides. Make your next al fresco experience a memorable one with these tips:

- **Play it safe.** Hot weather and perishable foods are a dangerous combination. Bacteria that cause illness thrive when moist proteins—such as mayonnaise, ground beef and egg salad—are stored above 41 degrees. Keep ingredients cold by submerging them in ice in insulated coolers. Don't let picnic foods sit out for more than an hour, and toss any leftovers.

- **Smellin' a melon:** Honeydews and cantaloupes should have a sweet aroma and be free of bruises and soft spots. Purchase melons a few days before your picnic so they have time to ripen on your counter. Once they're ready, refrigerate to prevent spoiling.

- **Don't bug me:** Hungry mosquitoes can take a bite out of you and your summer fun. Keep them away from your yard by removing standing water, their favorite breeding ground. Drain flower pots and change birdbath water daily. If you dislike bug spray, try clothing (from [sierratradingpost.com](http://sierratradingpost.com) and [llbean.com](http://llbean.com)) that is treated with insect repellent that lasts through multiple washes.



## Helping Hands

According to the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami, studies have shown that massage therapy can be beneficial in treating or relieving a variety of chronic pain issues including:

- ❑ Back pain
- ❑ Carpal tunnel syndrome
- ❑ Juvenile rheumatoid arthritis
- ❑ Fibromyalgia
- ❑ Migraine headaches

Ready to be rid of the pain? Schedule your next massage now by calling your local Massage Envy clinic. To find a clinic near you, visit [MassageEnvy.com](http://MassageEnvy.com).



# Pain, Pain Go Away

For people with chronic pain, massage therapy can bring real relief

**WE'VE ALL EXPERIENCED PAIN** at one time or another. But unless you live with chronic pain, it's tough to understand how severely it can infringe on your quality of life.

Massage therapy is one of the many treatments available for chronic pain. Diana L. Thompson, a licensed massage practitioner and president of the Massage Therapy Foundation, has seen first-hand how massage therapy can help people with chronic pain.

She participated in a study of various treatments for lower-back pain, including massage therapy. "With massage therapy, we were able to see positive results after as few as eight massage sessions," Thompson says. "And the relief continued for up to a year after the participants stopped receiving the massages."

Another benefit of massage therapy, Thompson points out, is the education massage therapists can provide during a series of sessions. "We can help people retrain their thinking so they can establish

a better relationship with their own body," she explains. "Then they can make decisions about how to take care of themselves, such as knowing when it's time for a massage, or to use an ice pack, or to do some stretching exercises or just take a break."

Lower-back pain and neck pain are among the most common types of chronic pain, but massage therapy can be beneficial for many other issues (see "Helping Hands"). If you suffer from chronic pain, be sure to tell your massage therapist about your condition. Share as much information as you can about how the pain is affecting your life, including specific activities you're having trouble with or avoiding because of pain.

"Really think about the results of massage in terms of your ability to participate more in your own life," Thompson says. "We might not be able to get rid of the pain completely, but we can help you be much more functional and comfortable in your daily life." —By Amy Lynn Smith



# One Step at a Time

Answers to four questions about walking for fitness

**YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT** taking up Pilates but don't want to invest in the equipment. And you considered joining a gym, but you're not sure how to use the machines properly. Never fear. There's an exercise nearly everyone can do. It doesn't require any complicated equipment and you already know the basics—after all, you've been doing it since you were a toddler. Can you guess what it is? It's walking, and it may be the perfect form of exercise.

"Walking is a great workout," says Cedric Bryant, chief science officer for the American Council on Exercise (ACE). "It's a skill we all have, so there's no learning curve, and it's safe and effective."

Here, we answer four questions to get you started on a walking program.

**Q: I'm very busy. How can I fit a daily walk into my schedule?**

A: First, it may help to understand just how important exercise is to your health. Not only does regular exercise help you maintain a healthy weight, it also helps keep your heart healthy, releases stress, helps you to sleep better, and reduces your risk of diabetes and certain types of cancer, among other things.

With that in mind, it may be easier to fit a daily walk into your schedule. But don't just try to remember. Write it in your calendar. And when someone asks you to do something during that time, tell them you're booked—because you are.

If devoting 30 minutes is too much to begin with, break it up into three 10-minute chunks and build from there.

**Q: How can I fit more steps into my regular routine?**

A: The walking you do throughout the day counts toward your daily total, too. Making an effort to take a few more steps here and there can go a long way.

First, get a pedometer, a device that counts your steps. The moment you clip it onto your belt, you'll be motivated to walk more. Then, look for opportunities throughout the day to up your step count.

You've probably already heard tips such as parking farther away from your destination and taking the stairs instead of the elevator, but consider other ideas as well. Walk to your co-worker's desk instead of sending an e-mail. When meeting a friend for coffee, get her to go for a walk around the building instead of sitting inside. Unload the dishwasher one or two pieces at a time.

**Q: How can I prevent injury?**

A: Warming up is a good idea before doing any type of exercise. Bryant recommends starting with five minutes of simple leg lifts or arm circles, or walking slowly to ready your body for exercise. And



## Find Your Path to Fitness

Are you feeling unmotivated to get moving? Consider checking out an online walking community, such as [mapmywalk.com](http://mapmywalk.com). It has great resources for

walkers of all levels, including tools that help you map your walking routes, measure mileage and calculate calories burned. Or, search for a walking route that's already been planned. You also can share your story with others and read theirs.

If you're ready to take your walking to the next level, check out [mapmyrun.com](http://mapmyrun.com). It has many of the same tools as the walking site but is geared toward runners. Still not enough? For tips and tools related to triathlons, go to [mapmytri.com](http://mapmytri.com).

after your walk, don't forget to cool down. Bryant recommends stretching as an effective cool-down. Plus, it builds flexibility.

The clothing you wear is also important. Wear comfortable clothes

that help regulate your body temperature to avoid overheating, and invest in proper footwear.

"Get a pair of shoes that provides good support, plenty of cushioning and a wide enough toe box," Bryant says. "A cross-training shoe should work well." And replace them as soon as they wear out. Walking shoes should only last nine to 12 months, depending on use, according to Bryant. Don't wait too long to replace yours.

**Q: What can I do about being sore after a walk?**

A: Any exercise may cause soreness, usually within 24 to 48 hours, according to ACE. Studies have found that a range of therapies can help, including applying ice to the affected area, stretching and taking nonsteroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs. Massage to relax the muscles is also effective, and can help prevent injury. It also makes for a nice reward for all the hard work you're doing to stay healthy. —By Shelley Flannery



### Pace Yourself

Are you unsure about how fast to walk? Keep your speed above a stroll but not so fast that you can't catch your breath. You should be able to carry on a normal conversation while walking, according to the American Council on Exercise.



# Drink to Your Health

When looking at your eating habits, don't overlook what's in your glass

**YOU WANT BALANCE** in your life and in your diet. So you're probably always on the lookout for convenient ways to get to that recommended minimum of five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. And grabbing a bottle of juice might seem like a smart strategy.

Well, it is ... sort of. According to Amy Jamieson-Petonic, a registered dietitian and American Dietetic Association spokeswoman, 100 percent fruit juice can be a good way to obtain nutrients. But there are some ways people can get tripped up and turn a positive move into a not-so-good one.

First, always look for the words "100% fruit juice" on the label. Items labeled as "fruit drinks" tend to be loaded with added sugar. Even more important is the amount of fruit juice you drink. Many of the "single-serving" bottles in stores are 20 ounces and contain 200 to 300 calories each. Jamieson-Petonic, who is also Employee Wellness manager for Cleveland Clinic,

*Check Your Fluid Levels. If you're thirsty, you're probably already dehydrated. But here's another quick way to test yourself: Pull the skin on your wrist up with two fingers. If it bounces back, you're hydrated. If the skin stays up, get yourself some water.*

suggests that most people limit their fruit juice intake to no more than eight ounces per day.

“The calories in fruit juice can really add up,” she explains. “I had one client who was consuming 1,000 additional calories per day from fruit juice alone. Once she stopped drinking juice, she started losing two pounds a week.”

### Smart Sipping

Some kinds of juice definitely have their benefits. For example, calcium-fortified orange juice can be a great alternative for people with lactose intolerance, says Jamieson-Petonic. Another good choice is 100 percent Concord grape juice, which she says has been shown in preliminary research to have a favorable impact on cardiovascular health. The skin of the grape tends to increase the elasticity of the blood vessels, to help reduce cardiac risk and blood pressure.

Vegetable juice also can be a convenient way to add nutrients, but look for low-sodium versions. And even if you go the most natural route and do the juicing yourself at home, don't expect the vegetable juice to pack the same nutritional punch as the whole food.

If you eat a carrot, for example, you'll get beta carotene and 500 other phytonutrients, which are chemicals that can reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer. Vegetable juice won't include as many of those phytonutrients, says Jamieson-Petonic, who always recommends whole foods over juice.

The same rule applies to fruit, she adds. Although 100 percent juice can provide vitamin C and antioxidants, plus calcium if it's fortified, a piece of fruit will contain even more of those goodies—plus dietary

fiber, which makes you feel more full and has health benefits of its own, such as lowering cholesterol levels and reducing the risk of digestive conditions.

### How to Hydrate

That being said, a sensible serving of 100 percent juice can be a healthy addition to a balanced diet. Plus, it does count toward your daily water intake.

Jamieson-Petonic, who is a sports nutritionist, suggests at least six glasses of water per day for most people and at least eight a day for active individuals. Athletes should start drinking an hour before the activity and consume at least four to six ounces of fluid every 10 to 15 minutes while exercising.

“The goal is to fully hydrate, to the point where your urine is clear, pale and straw-colored,” she says.

Hydration is always important, but especially before and after a massage. According to Jamieson-Petonic, who is also a licensed massage therapist, it's good to drink some water before your massage—but not so much that your bladder is uncomfortably full.

She also emphasizes the value of drinking plenty of water after your session. During a massage, the therapist is moving the skin, muscles, fascia, ligaments and tendons and working with the lymphatic system.

“Massage stroking can help rid the body of toxins,” says Jamieson-Petonic. “Between 60 and 70 percent of our body is water—every cell in your body needs water to perform every metabolic process. So when I give a massage, I always emphasize the importance of hydrating the cells and the body to help flush out those toxins.”

—By Amy Lynn Smith

## Fast Fruit & Flax Juice



*Try this simple recipe after your next massage. It provides calcium, which aids in muscle recovery, and vitamin C—an antioxidant that can help prevent oxidative damage from exercise or a vigorous massage. The flaxseed adds omega-3 fatty acids, which are important to anti-inflammatory processes, not to mention cardiac function, cognitive development and overall good health.*

### Ingredients

8 oz. calcium-fortified orange juice  
2 Tbsp. ground flaxseed  
3 ice cubes

### Instructions

Blend until smooth.

(Recipe courtesy of Amy Jamieson-Petonic, a registered dietitian, licensed massage therapist and American Dietetic Association spokeswoman.)




# How Massage Helps Me

Member Jeanine Kastens receives the 'healing touch'

BY REBECCA DOUGLAS  
PHOTO BY JEFF NEWTON

**M**assage Envy members are a fascinating group, each with a unique reason for joining. In the first installment of our new series, How Massage Helps Me, we introduce you to a straight-talkin' Texan who relies on the healing touch of massage therapy every week.

Before Jeanine Kastens was diagnosed with breast cancer, she occasionally enjoyed what she now calls a "frou-frou" massage. "You know, just for relaxation," explains the politically active grandmother from Pearland, Texas.



Serious complications from reconstructive surgery following her lumpectomy and double mastectomy, however, led to six other corrective surgeries. Before her last surgery, she suffered nerve damage and one of her implants opened up, leaving her incredibly sore. These days, massage is all about pain relief.

“It’s physical therapy,” she explains. “Massage is the only treatment I’ve found that relieves my pain.”

It’s also a regimen that all of her doctors support and encourage.

### That Special Quality

Sometimes Kastens’ muscles are so tense when she arrives for a massage, it’s hard for the therapist to make even a slight indentation in her back. “If I clean the bathroom or overdo it physically, I pay for it later,” she says. “One therapist worked so hard on me, he was wringing wet with sweat afterward. I was impressed that he was willing to make the extra effort to get the results I needed—even though he had to change his shirt afterward!”

Therapists who go above and beyond the normal call of duty is just one reason Kastens has come to the Pearland Massage Envy clinic at least once a week for the past two years. “Their talent and knowledge are impressive,” she raves. “They take the time to learn techniques from Asia and Europe and continue their study in areas like reflexology.”

One therapist found that working pressure points in Kastens’ feet is the best way to begin sessions when she is particularly stiff. “It settles me and my muscles down enough so they can make better progress on my back,” she explains.

### The Voice of Experience

Throughout more than 100 visits, Kastens has realized the benefits of seeing a variety of massage therapists. “I rotate according to where I’m hurting,” she explains. “While all the therapists have the healing touch, I find that sometimes one therapist is best when my sciatica is bothering me; another is better at hips and legs.”

Although she understands that many clients get comfortable with one therapist and only

want to see that particular person, Kastens urges them to give other therapists a try. “I think variety helps,” she notes. “They all have different personal strengths.”

Given her regular weekly visits and outgoing nature, Kastens is downright chummy with the Pearland Massage Envy staff. “They’re all so caring, you can’t help but get to know them,” she says. “I’m like a second mother or aunt to some of them; so I tell them exactly what I’m thinking.”

### Beyond Business

The staff’s Texas-size compassion was really driven home for Kastens when the Pearland clinic sponsored a Massage for the Cure event. “It was really touching,” she recalls. “All day long, the therapists gave massages for donations. All the revenue they brought in that entire day went to support local breast cancer programs.”

## Why Are You Looking Forward to Your Next Appointment?

Is massage your antidote to a high-stress job or perhaps the ultimate incentive for losing those last five pounds? Maybe it’s a respite from your rambunctious toddler or just plain routine maintenance.

Whatever your reasons are for getting regular massages, we’d love to hear them. Tell us how massage improves your life. Simply send us an e-mail at [memberstories@MassageEnvy.com](mailto:memberstories@MassageEnvy.com). Be sure to include your full name and phone number so we can contact you for more information. Who knows? You could be the next star of How Massage Helps Me.

So far, Pearland and about 75 other Massage Envy locations have raised more than \$400,000 with Massage for the Cure events. Over the next few years, the company hopes to expand the effort to its more than 430 clinics nationwide.

Despite her unfortunate diagnosis and unusual string of complications, Kastens considers herself lucky and celebrates each cancer-free milestone with enthusiasm—and a little less pain thanks to the therapists at Massage Envy. 🍀

# The Skin You're In

Put your best face forward with this summer skin routine

BY STEPHANIE THURROTT

The summer sun can wreak havoc on your skin. But with a simple routine and a few easy tips, you can keep your skin looking and feeling its best from your face to your feet.

## Keeping It Clean

Start with a cleaning routine. Summer's more humid air helps skin stay hydrated, so the dry, flaky skin that plagues many of us all winter is no longer a problem. But, with the weather, skin can switch over from dry to oily.

D'Anne Kleinsmith, M.D., a dermatologist at Bloomfield Dermatology Associates in West Bloomfield, Mich., recommends lighter cleansers this time of year. "I prefer the liquid cleansers to the bar soaps, which can be more alkaline and harsher to the skin," she says. For many people, she recommends Purpose, Cetaphil or Neutrogena cleansers.

Of course, summer's heat can lead to perspiration. Sweat contains not just water and salt, but proteins that need to be washed away so they don't clog your pores. A mild exfoliant is OK, but stay away from cleansers that are too abrasive.

## Keeping It Moist

Next up is a moisturizer. Many people like to change from a heavier, cream moisturizer to a

lighter lotion for the season, says Valori Treloar, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist at Integrative Dermatology in Newton, Mass.

If summer's perspiration has you showering more often, make sure you moisturize as soon as you get out. "Showering can dry out your skin, but applying moisturizer right out of the shower or bath helps to lock in water molecules," says Gregory Papadeas, D.O., a Denver-based dermatologist and past president of the Colorado Dermatologic Society.

For super-soft skin, many people find that the oils and lotions used during regular massage leave their skin feeling well-hydrated all over.

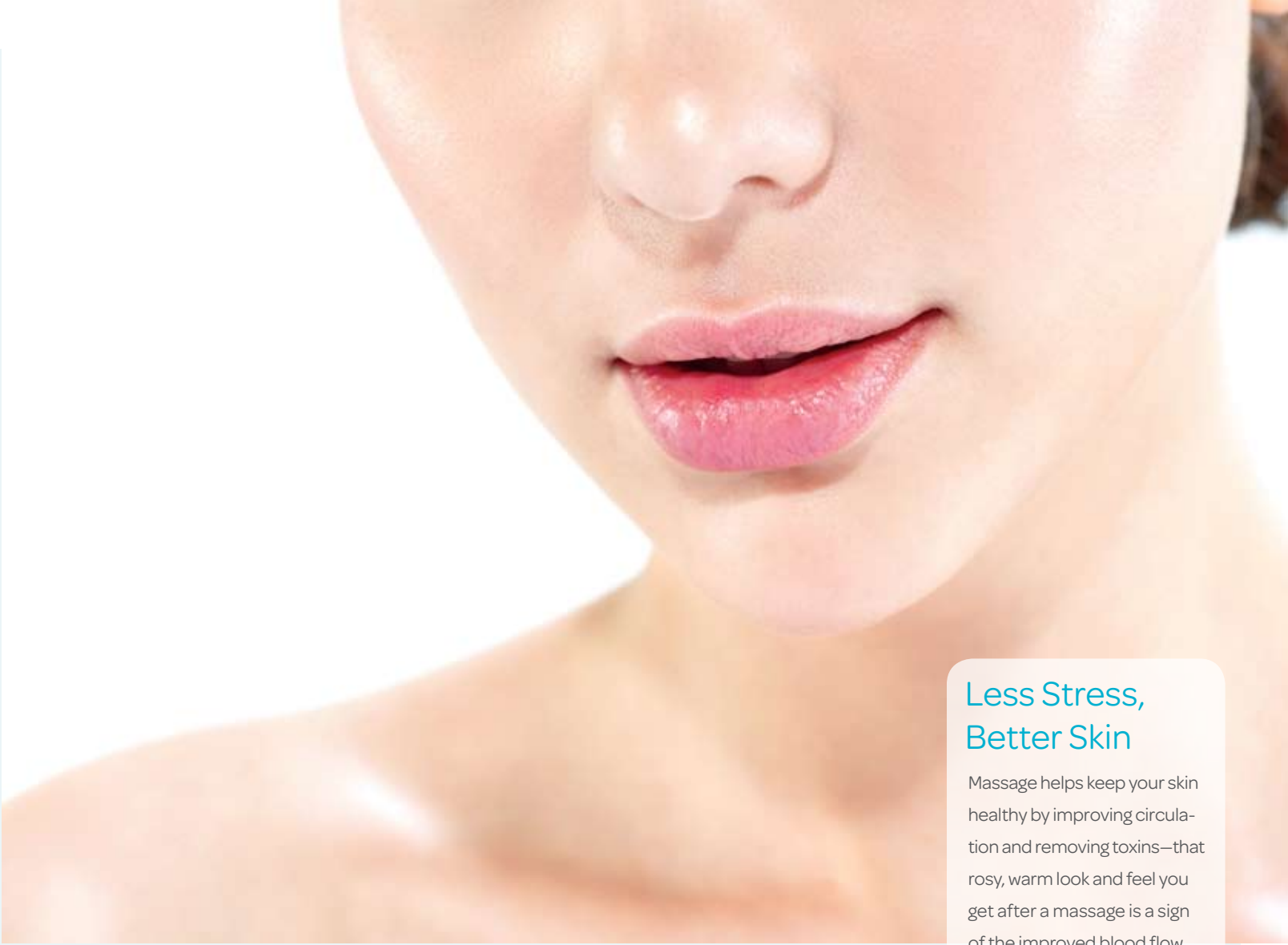
For skin that needs some special care, such as tough, dry spots on heels, feet and elbows, Dr. Papadeas recommends Aquaphor or Amlactin creams.

For summer's sunny days, many dermatologists recommend a morning moisturizer with a sunscreen. "I prefer that women use a moisturizer with a sunscreen rather than relying on their

makeup to contain a sunscreen," says Dr. Kleinsmith. "When you apply makeup, you're not going to apply a very heavy layer of the product, so the sunscreen coverage will not be adequate," she says. Neutrogena, Aveeno and Eucerin all offer good options.



*Go for the glow. A simple routine—cleaning, moisturizing and gentle exfoliating—will give your skin a glow that shines brighter than any tan.*



## Less Stress, Better Skin

Massage helps keep your skin healthy by improving circulation and removing toxins—that rosy, warm look and feel you get after a massage is a sign of the improved blood flow, which brings nutrients and carries away waste products.

“Massage promotes the health of the skin by getting more blood circulation into areas of the skin where they might not be getting the appropriate amount of blood circulation,” explains dermatologist Amy Newburger, M.D.

The stress-relief benefits of massage also can show on your skin. “Stress worsens many skin conditions, so the antistress benefits are not surprising,” says dermatologist Valori Treloar, M.D.

### Keeping It Fresh

To keep your skin looking fresh and clear during the summer months, alpha hydroxy creams and lotions or retinol creams can help exfoliate the skin and clean out the pores. “Glycolic acid is the most common example of an alpha hydroxy acid that’s found in these products,” Dr. Klein-smith says. Because these products remove the outer layer of skin, they make you more sensitive to the sun, making it especially important to protect yourself from those rays.

Amy Newburger, M.D., a dermatologist in Scarsdale, N.Y., a member of the teaching faculty at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital and a consultant for the FDA, points out that newer products, such as RevaléSkin, are coming out that combine different substances to better rejuvenate your skin. She also notes that you don’t have to spend a lot of money to get a decent product. When *Consumer Reports* reviewed products in 2007, the inexpensive Olay Regenerist came out on top.

### Keeping It Safe

You need to protect your skin from the sun’s rays all year, but those rays are strongest in summer. “Sun protection is very important. You need a broad-spectrum, SPF [sun protection factor] 15 or greater sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays,” Dr. Papadeas says.

Dr. Treloar sees sunscreen as a third line of defense—she recommends first staying indoors when the sun is at its strongest, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and then using clothing and hats to block the rays. Her concern with sunscreen is that some harmful rays may still break through, and that the chemicals your body absorbs from them might cause harm.

“Start out with habits that keep you out of the midday sun. Go to the beach in the morning, then come back and have a nice long lunch hour or go to the movies,” she says.

Or try a sunset walk on the shore—with the great skin care routine you’re following, you’ll glow with good health. ❀



# Om, Sweet Om

How to harness the soothing power of meditation

*Meditation Invitation*  
Meditation has ties to Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, among other religions. But you don't have to believe in a higher power to benefit from its relaxing, stress-reducing influences.

**MY MIND IS CONSTANTLY RACING.** From the moment I wake up in the morning until my head hits the pillow at night, I'm thinking, planning, strategizing and, unfortunately, stressing over the many aspects of life I want to control to perfection.

Recently a perceptive friend suggested I try meditating. "It'll help you let go," she said.

I laughed. Out loud. Me? Carve out time each day to clear my mind ... to think about *nothing*? Now there's a challenge.

## **Meditate Not Medicate**

Admittedly, I've been curious about meditation and its reported power to heal ever since my cardiologist recommended it as one of several lifestyle behaviors that could help manage my high blood pressure. (A National Institutes of Health study showed that the age-old practice reduces blockage in blood vessels, significantly lowering the risk of heart attack or stroke.) What's more, a simple Google search turned up articles crediting meditation with everything from improved intelligence and work performance to decreased medical costs and reversal of the aging process.

According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), numerous studies are under way to determine whether meditation affords meaningful health benefits. But in truth, humans have been meditating for thousands of years as a way to improve well-being. Some say it got its start with primitive hunter-gatherers who calmed themselves while staring into crackling fires, but the earliest records of meditative techniques date to Hindu scriptures written 5,000 years ago.

### Pick Your Practice

People talk about many different forms of meditation, but NCCAM singles out two types: concentrative and mindfulness.

In its simplest form, **concentrative meditation** centers on rhythmic breathing—slow, deep and even. In and out. As you absorb yourself in the repetition of inhaling and exhaling, you clear your mind of all thoughts, reaching a point of calm and enhanced clarity. Those who practice this Hinduism-based type of meditation also “concentrate” on sounds (“om”) or objects such as a flickering candle flame. The highly practiced and studied Transcendental Meditation falls into this category.

**Mindfulness meditation**, rooted in Buddhism, involves focusing your mind on the thoughts and actions you’re experiencing—without judgment. You’re taught to be in the moment, to listen to the chatter in your mind, the sound of your footsteps. But it teaches you not to be critical. Mindfulness meditation can be done anywhere, while doing anything.

### Getting Started

Practicing and benefiting from meditation shouldn’t be complicated and don’t require a commitment to a certain approach or technique. Just keep a few things in mind, recommends NCCAM:

**Choose a quiet spot.** You don’t need a room with statues and incense. But attempting to meditate in the family room while the kids are playing their video games probably won’t work if you’re a beginner. Look for a place with minimal distractions where you can concentrate.

**Pick your posture.** You don’t have to twist yourself into a lotus pretzel. Sit comfortably, stand or lie down if you’d like. Just don’t get so comfortable that you fall asleep. As you perfect your practice, you may even be able to meditate while walking.

**Find your focus.** Breathing is a good place to start. Inhale deeply and slowly from the abdomen rather than your chest. Some meditators choose a word or phrase (known as a mantra) as their focal point. Others choose an object. This helps bring your mind back to a single point when it starts drift off.

## Twice as Nice

Meditation alone helps relieve stress. But in combination with other relaxation methods, it will have an even greater effect on your overall well-being. Here are some perfect pairings.

**Meditation + Massage.** C.G. Funk, Massage Envy VP of Industry Relations and Product Development, says massage and meditation can be a beneficial combination. “Therapists often use some form of meditation with clients during massage to help them relax and become more aware or present,” she explains. “Sometimes the therapist will have the client focus on their breath as a way of calming and centering, or they may coach the client to visualize a peaceful scene that creates a relaxation response.”

**Meditation + Aromatherapy.** Though meditation is usually recognized as a spiritual practice, numerous studies have shown that meditation also has many health benefits. It provides a simple way to balance your physical, emotional and mental state, and its countless values have been known and practiced for thousands of years. Veria is dedicated to helping you achieve that by providing high-quality products for your meditation practice, such as Veria candles and incense, which come in a variety of relaxing scents to soothe the mind and melt the day away.

**Meditation + Music.** Look for soft, soothing organic sounds. Veria offers spirit-nurturing CDs that create a shift in mood and change the energy of the day, as well as meditation zafus (traditional meditation cushions) to provide a high-quality firm foundation for your meditation practice.

If you’d like more information on these and other fine products, visit [www.veria.com/meditation](http://www.veria.com/meditation).

**Be positive.** Don’t let distractions or wandering thoughts get in your way. You’ll have them. Just let them pass and then refocus.

### Practice Makes Perfect

Experts recommend devoting 20 minutes a day to your practice. I’ve taken baby steps in that direction, spending 10 minutes each evening before bed in my quiet space. There, I keep a tiny ceramic ladybug given to me by my daughter. It’s my focal point and a reminder of why it’s good to quiet the mind. During those 10 minutes, I let go. And though I haven’t slowed down by day or totally eliminated stress, I do seem to sleep easier and wake up in the morning feeling more refreshed. Try it. —*By Beth Tomkiw*

# NIRVANA

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