



# Learn the Art of Energizing Yourself

## Through massage, physical activity and nutrition

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### Reduce tension in seconds – anywhere

Massage helps reduce muscle tension and stiffness in numerous ways, including increasing blood flow to your muscles. Some research shows that regular massage may also boost immunity by stimulating the production of white blood cells. Massage helps you relax and improve your mental energy. It may also make you more productive at work.

One University of Miami study found that a brief self-massage at work reduced stress and boosted job performance. After a 15-minute massage, workers were more alert and could complete math problems faster and with more accuracy.

Fortunately, you have your very own massage therapist with you at all times -- your hands! "Most people practice the art of self-massage without thinking about it, whether they are rubbing their forehead because of a headache, scrubbing themselves with a loofah sponge in the shower, or rubbing their feet after a long day," says Anna Walsemann, a yoga and Oriental healing instructor at New Age Health Spa in Neversink, New York. "These are all simple and natural self-massage techniques."

You don't have to take a class to give yourself a proper rubdown. In this article, you'll get the advice you need to reduce tension from head to foot -- within seconds.

**1. Every morning and evening, hammer out the kinks.** Using your fists, gently thump the outside of your body, starting with your legs and arms, working from top to bottom. Then move inward to your torso and thump from bottom to top. "Pummeling your muscles and bones will help strengthen the body, stimulate blood circulation, and relax nerve endings," says Walsemann. When done in the morning, this self-massage technique will waken and prepare your body -- and mind -- for the day ahead. When done before bed, it calms down the mind and beats out the stress and tension of the day. One warning: If you're taking any kind of blood thinner, such as Coumadin (warfarin), avoid this one; you could wind up with bruising.

**2. Rub your belly after every meal.** Most of us do this instinctively, especially after overeating. Place one or both palms on your abdomen and rub it in clockwise circles. This is the same direction food naturally moves through your intestine, so your circular massage will help to stimulate digestion.

**3. Rub yourself down before and after exercise.** Massaging your body before your stretching, cardio, or strength training increases blood flow to the muscles. Massaging your muscles after exercise may help encourage waste removal and speed muscle recovery. Before exercise, use a pummeling motion with your fists to bring blood flow to your leg and arm muscles. After exercise, rub along your muscles with your palm or fist, moving in the direction of your heart.

**4. Give your hands a massage every day -- whenever you put on lotion.** Start with the bottoms of your palms by clasping your fingers and rubbing the heels of your palms together in a circular motion. Then, with your hands still clasped, take one thumb and massage the area just below your other thumb in circular motions, moving outward to the center of the palm. Repeat with the other hand. Then release your fingers and use your thumbs and index fingers to knead your palms, wrists, and the webbing between your fingers. With one hand, gently pull each finger of the other hand. Finish by using your thumb and index finger to pinch the webbing between your other thumb and index finger.

**5. Roll on a tennis ball whenever you feel tight.** If your foot feels tense, stand with one hand on a wall for support and place the arch of one foot on top of the ball. Gradually add more body weight over the foot, allowing the ball to press into your arch. Begin to slowly move your foot, allowing the ball to massage your heel, forefoot, and toes. Note: If the tennis ball seems too big for your foot, try a golf ball instead.

You can also lie on the ball to get at that hard-to-reach spot between the shoulder blades or to soothe tension in your low back. For tight hips, sit on the ball, wiggling your booty around and holding it in any spot that feels particularly good.

### **Get on the Ball**

**6. Fill the bottom of a shoe box with golf balls and stick it under your desk at work.** Whenever you need to take a trip to podiatric paradise, take off a shoe and rub your foot over the golf balls.

**7. Whenever you take off a pair of high heels, sit on the floor and give your calves some attention.** Elevating your heels all day long can eventually shorten your calf muscles. To release them, sit with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Grasp one ankle, placing your thumb just above your Achilles tendon. Press your thumb into the bottom of your calf muscle, hold for 5 seconds, and release. Move an inch up your calf and repeat the pressure. Continue pressing and releasing until you get to your knee, then switch legs.

**8. Fill a tube-style athletic sock three-fourths full with uncooked rice, tie off the end tightly with a rubber band, and stick it in the microwave for 2 minutes.** Remove the sock and rub it up and down your legs and arms for a gentle, soothing hot massage. Leave the sock filled with the rice; you can use it over and over. You can add spices to the rice if you wish to have a pleasant scent while massaging.

**9. Use your hands to heel your neck.** Once an hour, take a break from staring at your computer and clasp your fingers behind your neck, pressing the heels of your palms into your neck on either side of your spinal column. Massage the heels of your hands up and down in slow, deliberate motions. Then place the fingers of your right hand on your trapezius muscle along the left side of your neck just below the base of your skull. Press into that muscle, tilt your head to the left, and rub downward until you reach your shoulder. Repeat three times; then switch sides.

Finish by stretching your head back so the top of your office chair presses into your neck just below your skull. This also stretches out the front of your neck, which tends to get tight during deskwork. Hold for 20 seconds.

**10. Open your sinuses with some finger pressure.** If you have clogged sinuses due to a cold or allergies, rub them with your index fingers. Start just above your brow line. Place your finger pads just above your nose, press down and rub outward, tracing your brow line as you go. Repeat two or three times. Then place the pads of your fingers below your eyes and to the sides of the bridge of your nose, rubbing outward and moving downward with each stroke. Now use your thumbs to massage your cheekbones, making small circles starting at the center of your face and moving out toward your ears. Finally, place your thumbs on your temples and massage them in small circles.

**11. When your eyes feel tired from staring at your computer screen all day long, give them some heat.** Rub your hands together vigorously until you feel the skin on your palms begin to warm up. Then cup one hand over each eye, feeling the heat from your hands relax your eyes.

### **The Rubdown**

**12. When your feet are sore after a long day of standing, take off your shoes and socks, wash your feet, and give them a rubdown.** Sitting on a comfortable couch or chair, thread the fingers of one hand through the toes of one foot, spreading out your toes and placing the palm of your hand against the bottom of your foot. Use your palm to gently rotate the joints of your forefoot forward and back for one minute. Then remove your fingers from your toes, hold your ankle with one hand, and gently rotate the entire foot with the other hand, starting with small circles and progressing to larger circles as your ankle warms up. Switch directions, and then repeat with the other foot.

**13. Give yourself a bear hug to relax away shoulder tension.** Cross your arms over your chest and grab a shoulder with either hand. Squeeze each shoulder and release three times. Then move your hands down your arms, squeezing and releasing until you get to your wrists.

**14. Rub lavender oil onto your feet before bed.** Lavender-scented oils are available at most health food stores. The smell of lavender and the gentle massaging motions you make as you work the oil into your feet will help you to unwind. An added bonus: The nightly oil treatment softens and hydrates any rough, dry spots on your feet. Once you're done with your massage, put on a pair of socks to prevent the oil from rubbing off onto your sheets.

**15. After tennis, cycling, rock climbing, and other arm-tiring sports, give your arms a pinch.** Place your right arm across your chest with your elbow bent. Reach across your chest with your left arm and pinch your right arm's triceps, near the shoulder, with the thumb and index finger of your left hand. Hold for a few seconds, release, then pinch again an inch lower on the arm. Continue pinching and releasing until you've made your way to your elbow. Then pinch your right arm's biceps near your armpit and work your way in the same way down to the elbow. Then switch arms. This will release the tension in your muscles and help improve blood circulation.

**16. When you have a headache, stand up, bend forward from the hips, and place your forehead on a padded chair.** The chair will gently place pressure on your head as you relax in the forward bend. Hold about 30 seconds. When you rise, sit down and spread your fingers through your hair, making a fist. Gently pull the hair away from your head. Hold 2-3 seconds, then release. This stretches the fascia along your scalp, releasing tension. Continue to grab different clumps of hair all over your head, working from the top front of your head, progressing to the sides, and then to the back of your head. Once you have grabbed and released your entire scalp, return to work, feeling refreshed.

**17. Keep a tennis ball on your desk and squeeze it regularly.** The squeezing motion helps rejuvenate tired fingers and hands, and strengthens your hands for other self-massage techniques.

**18. Deskercise.** There are many ways to add physical activity into your daily 'desk' routine. Below is a sample 3 minute routine that can be done throughout the day. Stand up and walk for 30 seconds, sit down in your chair and stand up (repeat for 30 seconds), stand up and bend to left side for 15 seconds, then repeat on right side; sit in your chair and twist/stretch your torso tightening your obliques and low back.

**19. Get in your physical activity!** October 2008 national recommendations include:

1. 2 hours 30 min per week of moderate physical activity or 1 hour 15 min vigorous\*\*
  2. Muscular strength exercises 2 times per week
- \*\*at least 10 min bouts

**20. EAT for Energy! Increase:**

- 1. B Vitamin:** Support nervous system and adrenal gland. Examples include: brewers yeast, liver, Soy, broccoli, legumes, fresh meats, unprocessed grains, lentils, salmon, corn, nuts, seeds, Eggs, citrus foods
- 2. C Vitamin:** Antioxidant, improves immunity, lowers blood pressure, lowers cortisol levels. Examples include: citrus fruit, green leafy veggies, melons, tomatoes, broccoli, mango, Red/green bell peppers
- 3. Amino Acids:** building block of proteins- supports brain function, especially neurotransmitters, Which impact mood and behavior. Examples include: egg, meat, fish, vegetable protein
- 4. Magnesium:** Muscle relaxation, heart beat regulation, cure insomnia and anxiety. Examples Include: dairy, meat, fish, seafood, nuts, tofu, green leafy veggies, whole grain

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<sup>i</sup> Some exercises from "Stealth Health"