The Benefits of Facial Massage

Natalia Doran

A well-performed facial massage is a wonderful treat that will help relieve puffiness and improve skin tone and complexion. Other physical benefits of a facial massage include stimulation of the skin’s immune mechanisms, firming of weak muscles, tissue regeneration, and anti-aging effects. There are also many mental benefits, including stress relief and a greater awareness of the body-mind connection.

How the Skin Moves Nutrients

In order to fully understand the benefits of facial massage, it is helpful to understand the anatomy and physiology of the skin.

We all know that skin is a complex organ consisting of a number of specialized cells. Its functions include pH and temperature regulation, and sebum and sweat production. The condition of the integumentary system (the skin and its components) depends on homeostasis and the coordination of circulatory, nerve, muscular, endocrine, and lymphatic systems. The skin’s outer layer, the epidermis, does not have a direct blood supply—all nutrients, water, and oxygen needed to feed these cells must come from the dermis. If nutrients are lacking in the dermis, the skin cells will be undernourished.

To move from the dermis to the epidermis, nutrients must cross the basement membrane that joins these two layers. Small molecules, such as water, oxygen, carbon dioxide, and glycerol, can cross this membrane by diffusion. Larger molecules must cross by facilitated diffusion (being carried across by proteins). Nutrients or other substances that exist in lower concentrations in the dermis than in the epidermis must be moved into the epidermis by active transport. Water, an effective transportation system, can pass through membranes in response to changes in ion concentration. Hormones and mechanical movements, such as massage, can regulate the rate at which water passes through the membrane.

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What about absorption from the outside of the skin into the underlying tissues of the body? Skin permits absorption, but the tightly located coenocytes and lipids between cells make absorption limited. When products are applied to the skin, certain elements play a role in the absorption rate, including the features of the skin, changes in skin barrier function, size of product molecules, and the type of delivery system used in the product.

Connective tissue also plays a role in how the skin moves nutrients. All substances that are transported in the blood must pass through the connective tissue to reach the cells or to be removed as waste. Connective tissue contains cells that produce collagen and elastin, and a half-gel, half-fluid binding mass called the ground substance, which surrounds every cell. Through the ground substance, nutrients are transported from the blood capillaries to the cell, and waste products are moved from the cells to the capillaries. The condition of the ground substance will affect the diffusion rate of nutrients and waste products, creating the cells' environment. This environment can be clean and healthy, or polluted with metabolic wastes.

Applying pressure and movement through massage can help to normalize the function and composition of the connective tissue, and free it of harmful substances.

**Lymphatic Massage**

The body’s lymphatic system is responsible for draining away the debris from our cells. It transports water out of the tissue, along with waste substances: bacteria, cell fragments, immobile cells, inorganic substances, large molecular fats, proteins, and viruses. This process is constantly happening all over the body, as the lymph cleanses each cell and drains away the debris in a circulatory system powered only by breathing and muscle movements. With mechanical manipulation such as massage, the lymph system can move up to 10 times more fluid than it normally does.

Manual lymph drainage (MLD), which was developed by Emil Vodder, PhD, is a type of gentle massage that accelerates the natural circulation of the lymph and encourages its movement away from swollen areas. MLD is firm, but gentler than ordinary massage. Because the lymph vessels are all interlinked, lymph flow will be affected in the entire region of the area being massaged. Other types of lymphatic massage include lymph drainage therapy, developed by Bruno Chikly, MD.

A facial massage that involves lymphatic work improves circulation to the skin, which increases nutrition to the skin cells and speeds up the filtering of water in and out of cells, removing waste products. The vasodilation of the surface capillaries during massage improves skin color, and facial massage also improves elasticity and suppleness of the skin. With facial massage, the skin becomes more balanced, less prone to breakouts, and more resistant to infection.

*Natalia Doran, MD, is the founder and president of the International Skin Beauty Academy in Illinois. She has a medical degree in dermatology and a master’s degree in educational psychology.*
Be Smart About Sunscreen

Jason Barbaria

According to the American Cancer Society, more than 2 million people are diagnosed with skin cancer in the United States each year. There are more than 2,000 over-the-counter sunscreen formulas on the market today. How can you tell which sunscreens are the safest, most effective, and represent the best value for your money? In most cases, the answer comes down to the difference between the two types of filtering ingredients. Here’s what you need to know.

Chemical or Physical?
The UV radiation in sunlight consists of UV-A, UV-B, and UV-C rays. UV-A and UV-B are both responsible for photoaging, skin cancer, sunburn, tanning, and wrinkling. UV-C is not a factor in skin health, as it is absorbed by the Earth’s atmosphere and does not reach us in significant amounts. Broad-spectrum sunscreen protects against both UV-A and UV-B. This protection can work in one of two ways: chemical or physical.

Chemical UV Filters
- Work by absorbing UV radiation.
- Require application 30 minutes before sun exposure.
- Provide partial protection from UV spectrum.
- May irritate the skin and eyes.
- Not regulated for safety by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA); some may even be carcinogenic.
- Not photostable (exposure to sunlight degrades effectiveness).
- Avobenzone is the most commonly used chemical filter ingredient.

Physical UV Filters
- Work by reflecting UV radiation.
- Start protecting immediately upon use.
- Provide full broad-spectrum protection.
- Non-irritating to skin and eyes.
- Safe, as particles do not penetrate the skin.
- Highly photostable (exposure to sunlight does not change effectiveness).

Zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are the most commonly used physical filter ingredients. Clothing and shade structures also count as physical filters.

Jason Barbaria is director of marketing at Dermagenics, a skin care line that includes sunscreen, cleansers, and moisturizers.

Secrets of Sleep

Jed Heneberry

We’ve all heard it before: get your eight hours of sleep and watch your life improve. But the reason we’ve all heard it is because it’s true, and research keeps showing the importance of sleep and its variety of health benefits.

The National Sleep Foundation says there is no "magic number" of hours for optimum sleep benefits, but that different age groups, and even different individuals, need different amounts of sleep. General recommendations are 7-8 hours per night for adults, while children often need 10-11 hours. Getting less than what you need has been linked to an increased risk of diabetes, heart problems, psychiatric conditions, and more.

Here’s a quick look at some new findings that reveal the secrets of sleep, and also how to get more of it.

- Sleep Suppresses Appetite: Just one night of sleep loss can increase brain activity in the region that contains appetite sensation in response to food images, increasing the long-term possibility of becoming overweight. "Lack of Sleep Makes Your Brain Hungry," The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism.
- Cherry on Top: Drinking tart cherry juice increased melatonin in study participants, improving sleep efficiency, quality, and time. "Effect of Tart Cherry Juice on Melatonin Levels and Enhanced Sleep Quality," European Journal of Nutrition.
- Naps for Your Noggin: The right side of the brain, which is generally associated with creativity, is active during so-called power naps, while the left brain remains mostly quiet. While it is not clear what exactly is happening during these brief rest periods, researchers suspect the brain is conducting important memory tasks. "'Power Naps' May Boost Right-Brain Activity," Health.com.
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Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others, cannot keep it from themselves

–James M. Barrie

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