

# IN TOUCH



Spring, 2011

Above are some images from my trekking trip in Nepal last October

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One of the great things about my work is that I get to interact with people on a one-on-one basis every day. I learn a great deal about what's important to my clients, what their interests are, and how what I do can impact their daily lives. In talking with each of you, I've made mental notes about issues which I've felt I can offer some further insight. In this newsletter, I've selected three topics to explore which I believe may be of interest to you. This season's topics are:

- 1) [The Value of Massage therapy](#)
- 2) [Insights into Stretching](#)
- 3) [The Whiplash Story](#)

## The Value of Massage Therapy

A lot of people think that massage therapy is something new in the health care field. In reality it is one of the oldest medical treatments on record, dating back to about 3000 BC. Even in British Columbia massage therapy has a long track record. It has been part of the provincial health care system for over 50 years and was part of the Medical Services Plan (MSP) since its inception in 1968, until 2002 when massage therapy coverage was sacrificed by the provincial government as a cost cutting measure. Currently, however, those on [MSP Premium Assistance](#), (BC residents who have a net income of \$30,000 or less) still have partial massage therapy coverage.

Massage therapy is one of the best forms of preventative health care available. I liken it to your automobile maintenance. If you constantly wait until your car breaks down before you take it into the garage, that car will not last long. On the other hand, if you change the oil regularly, have routine tune ups and generally keep your car in tip-top shape, it will function well for years. I think that's just one good reason to include massage therapy as part of a regular body maintenance regime.

As many of you know, physical tension can lead to psychological tension. Massage therapy can induce a parasympathetic state, which enables the body to recharge and relax. Massage therapy can facilitate the automatic relaxation of your mind and body, and lower your heart rate.

According to Melzack & Wall ([Pain Gate Control Theory](#)), the sensation of touch travels faster through nervous system pathways than pain. Touch can therefore reduce the sensation of pain. For example, if you bump your shin, rubbing the area takes the pain sensation away because touch induces a parasympathetic response. An injury or condition can cause you to lose the ability to move normally. Massage therapy can help restore the natural, fluid movement of muscles and joints, allowing you to return to an active lifestyle.

If there is one thing we all want to avoid, it is pain. In many cases nothing relieves pain faster or more effectively than massage therapy. Massage therapy helps repair and heal the injury, therefore reducing pain, or even stopping it altogether. And, unlike painkilling medication, massage therapy can help you avoid possible negative side effects, such as drowsiness, or nausea. An additional advantage of massage therapy is that excessive tension and related pain throughout the body can be reduced, enabling a more balanced use of muscles, tendons and ligaments, allowing your body to strengthen and naturally optimize physical performance.

## New Insights into Stretching

When engaging in dynamic physical exercises (such as running, hockey, tennis, basketball, etc.) there are two different types of stretching commonly accepted today: dynamic stretching and static stretching.

**DYNAMIC STRETCHING** according to Kruz, "...involves moving parts of your body and gradually increasing reach, speed of movement, or both." Good examples of commonly used dynamic stretches are slow, controlled leg swings, arm swings, or torso twists. Here is a great [dynamic stretching video](#).

It is important to warm up prior to doing dynamic stretching because it reduces muscle tightness, decreasing the likelihood of muscle tears. Dynamic stretching increases range of movement, blood and oxygen flow to soft tissues prior to exertion. A warming up exercise, for example, could involve a 5 or 10 minute jog. Be careful not to bounce or jerk, and be careful not to take the muscle beyond its natural range of motion.

**STATIC STRETCHING** according to Alter, consists of, "stretching a muscle (or group of muscles) to its farthest point and then maintaining or holding that position." Here is a link to some good information on [static stretching](#) on the internet.

There are two reasons for stretching. The first is to maintain your range of motion, which is what dynamic stretching achieves. The second is to improve the range, which is the function of static stretching. Most athletic professionals would suggest that it is better to do dynamic stretching before a physical activity and static stretching afterwards.



## Whiplash

Whiplash associated disorders (WAD) are characterized by a sudden and unexpected movement of the head in one direction and then in reverse. This is often the result of a rear end collision but can occur with a collision from any direction. Symptoms include neck pain and stiffness, headaches, tingling or numbness in arms or legs, and even concentration and memory problems. Occasionally people develop jaw pain ([temporomandibular joint {TMJ} dysfunction syndrome](#)). Ringing in the ears ([tinnitus](#)) can be a symptom on rare occasions. One in four people with whiplash report symptoms lasting longer than 3 months. Whiplash can include injury to the [facet joints](#), [discs](#), [ligaments](#) and [muscles](#). If these symptoms occur, a visit with your physician is a necessity. Your medical doctor will assess the situation, and depending on your condition may request specialized tests such as x-rays, or, in more severe circumstances, a CT-scan or MRI. Cervical collars were used in the past but the current trend is to encourage early movement rather than immobilization. Ice pack application is often indicated in the first few days to decrease inflammation in the damaged tissues.

Research studies have provided medical evidence for the use of massage therapy techniques in the treatment of WAD:

- “Massage is the most frequently used therapy for musculoskeletal problems, and is particularly useful in controlling pain.” QTF on Spinal disorders. “Scientific Approach in the Assessment and Management of Activity Related Spinal Disorders. A Monograph for Clinicians. Spine 12, no 7, suppl: (Sep. 1987): sl-59
- “In the early phases of WAD, short courses of cervical manipulations or mobilization therapies have been shown to be of benefit. These procedures should be conducted by skilled or trained professionals, which may include...massage therapists or physicians.” PMRF BC Whiplash Initiative Comprehensive Syllabus page 77, 1997.
- “...massage therapy is very useful in getting the knots out of muscles and providing you some pain free time to get on with the work of stretching and strengthening your back.” Allen, Murray E., and Pothier, B. Take Charge of Your Back, Canadian Cataloguing Publication, 1990.

Advice with respect to a therapeutic sleeping posture is crucial, as well as instruction in the appropriate preliminary mobilization exercises (progressing to more strenuous remedial exercise), and certain lifestyle modifications.

## ICBC Coverage

ICBC will usually approve up to 12 massage therapy treatments within 8 weeks from the date of the MVA. A referral from a medical doctor is necessary.

