

Three Simple Ways to Change Your Life!

Pamela Beth Berger, LMT

“Everything should be made as simple as possible. Any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius to move in the opposite direction.”

—Albert Einstein

As our lives get busier and crazier, we often feel frustrated, overwhelmed, and out of balance. Stress, whether self-imposed or otherwise, can risk our very health. Without our health, everything else quickly becomes secondary. As a massage therapist, I interact with people on many levels to help restore that balance.

In my life, I've learned to appreciate the little things. I am constantly reminded to be grateful for what is, and I look for the gift in everything that comes my way. I've learned to trust the process and understand that every single thing that shows up does so for a good reason. As Einstein says, I focus on simplicity as a lifestyle. The real secrets to a better life are often so simple that we overlook them and ignore the big difference they can make.



So, I tell my clients to keep it simple. Along with the basics of regular exercise, good diet, and a positive attitude, here are three major keys to achieving great health. When practiced for just minutes a day, they can be life-changing. They are simply:

- 1) breathing more consciously,
- 2) drinking more water, and
- 3) stretching!

1) **B-R-E-A-T-H-I-N-G.** Most of us don't use breathing to its full advantage, let alone appreciate its potential for powerful change. In fact, most of us

breathe at only 20% of our full capacity. We take it for granted, yet breathing plays an integral part in fueling all our biological systems, feeding our cells, moving and

clearing away toxins, renewing our life-force energy, and helping us become more conscious and alive! Just like a good massage, it has the ability to both invigorate and relax us simultaneously.

My role as a therapist is to assist my clients' innate ability to return to wholeness and alignment. This sounds simple and in many ways it is. Our sessions start with a conscious focus on breath. The human



body is a self-correcting mechanism and is continually regenerating itself in a capacity that is far beyond what most of us experience as our reality. Using the breath for self-healing is key.

2) **W-A-T-E-R.** Next, it's important to drink plenty of water. Like motor oil keeping an automobile running smoothly, water is the simple lubricant that is critical to a smoothly functioning system. Especially after a deep-tissue massage, extra water is needed to flush away accumulated toxins released into the bloodstream.

Where water is present, life abounds. Our body is 70% water and relies on good hydration to function properly. But don't wait until you feel thirsty—by that time, your body is already dehydrated. One simple health habit is to drink a tall glass of water first thing in the morning, before consuming anything else. This helps to “prime the pump” and to flush the waste that the body has metabolized all night long.

Our bodies are constantly giving us indications of what they need. Many times, a headache is a reminder to drink

more water, or to breathe more deeply. Often, we mistake what feels like hunger for what is actually early-stage dehydration. So, especially if you like the idea of naturally eating less, consider having a glass of water before helping yourself to calories. It may just satisfy that overactive sense of appetite.

What about drinking with your meals? Since drinking a lot of water while eating dilutes digestive enzymes and stomach acid, it's important to drink your water thirty minutes before a meal. People ask, "Why water?"

Why not juice, soda, or herbal tea?" Water absorbs quickly directly into the bloodstream, while drinking anything else involves more complex processes to assimilate and takes more energy. Beverages with caffeine or alcohol (both diuretics), and sugar (or its substitutes) can actually deplete minerals and tax the system. Clean, pure water is as simple as it gets.

3) **S-T-R-E-T-C-H-I-N-G!**

Whether you enroll in a yoga class, or simply stretch in simple ways on your own, stretching is the third means I recommend to dramatically improve your health. It helps us stay flexible (physically, mentally and emotionally), reduces stress, and contributes to a more balanced lifestyle.

Most people carry tension in their shoulders. A simple,



side-to-side stretching for your neck and head can set the tone for a better day. Drop your head to the right, ear to shoulder. Place your left hand behind the small of your back and pull the left shoulder down simply by lowering your elbow. Inhale and reach up to the top of your head

with your right hand. With a full exhalation, gently pull your head down towards your right shoulder. Hold it there for a few, slow, deep breaths. With every exhalation, let the left side of your neck

relax a little more.

As you stretch, you can tilt your head slightly to the front and back to target different, specific neck muscles that need stretching. Now alternate this exercise to the other side. Remember to focus on your breathing during stretching for optimal oxygenation and relaxation.

Another major stretch I recommend is a version of "touch your toes," with NO attempt or effort to actually reach the floor. Instead, it's about coming to rest wherever is most comfortable. The idea is to REST in a stretch and let gravity do the work. (Your exhalation will naturally come when your lungs are contracted by the stretch itself.)

Here's how it goes. Stand up straight with your feet a

shoulder width apart. Start with your neck by tucking in your chin, and lower your body forward one vertebra at a time. Slowly bend down until you are resting in a natural and comfortable bent-over position with arms relaxed, hanging loosely. Now, gently inhale, and with every exhalation, let yourself relax a little further into the stretch. Then, when you're done, slowly come back to an upright position, again, one vertebra at a time. This stretches everything from the Achilles tendons, calves and hamstrings, to the back, neck and shoulders. They say every forward-bending pose should be balanced with a backward-bending one. So now, with a deep breath, lift your arms up and slightly backward to complement your forward stretch.

If you have any concerns



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about injuries or limitations, consult a professional before beginning a stretching routine. I also suggest stretching after a hot bath or shower since the muscles are warmed and will produce optimal results.

In my experience, there are two major causes underlying most all dysfunctions of the body. These are stress and accumulated toxins. These simple lifestyle practices (along with self-care choices like walking, yoga or massage) are profound, preventative therapies. After all, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

Henry David Thoreau said, *“Our lives are frittered away by detail. Simplify! Simplify!”* Make your lifestyle improvements easy and doable. Start with a few minutes a day. Simple changes can make a big difference! My favorite motto is, “Do the simplest thing

first in case it works!” You always have time for the things you put first. So, take care of yourself first! Slow down, and make quiet spaces in your day.

When you feel stressed, take a few, slow, deep breaths from your belly. Drink a glass of cool, pure water (adding a twist of lemon will help to alkalize), and do a few nurturing stretches. Let these simple steps help you feel more centered and clear. Then, be grateful for the abundance that IS your life! ■

Pamela Berger is a licensed massage therapist specializing in deep tissue massage, Cranio-Sacral Therapy, Swedish and intuitive energy techniques. For testimonials, go to www.HeartHandsHealingTouch.com. She is located at 521 West Lamme. For an appointment, call Pamela at 522-5476.



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