

# 3 Simple Ways to Change Your Life!

by 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



nce again, the holidays are here. We're all so busy looking ahead, making plans, trying to get it all done and to get somewhere, we sometimes lose our perspective. We spread ourselves too thin, create self-imposed stress, and can risk our health in the process. Ask anyone who has had a health-related wake-up call—enjoying life and love is all that's important! If we don't have our health, nothing else really matters.

I've had my share of wake-up calls and a lot of reminders of what's most important in life—and I always come back to appreciating the little things. I remind myself to be present in the moment, to be grateful for what is, and to look for the gift in everything. This way I can better enjoy (and trust) the processes of life. I agree with Einstein and try to focus on the simple things—like remembering to breathe. The real secrets to a



better life are often so simple that people overlook them and ignore the big difference they can make.

As a massage therapist, I interact with all kinds of people on many levels. My intent is to facilitate their best possible integration of mind, body and spirit. This holistic approach contributes to their feeling of relaxed strength, balance and receptivity.

Trying to stay well-informed about health can seem complicated and overwhelming these days. But let's keep it simple. Along with maintaining exercise, good diet and a positive attitude, I teach that good health includes three basics we all can do daily to take more responsibility for our well-being. When practiced for just a few minutes, they have the potential to be life-changing. They are: 1) breathing more consciously; 2) drinking more water; and 3) stretching.

I'm always reminding people to B-R-E-A-T-H-E! **Breathing** is one of our automatic functions, so most of us don't use it to full advantage, let alone appreciate its potential power. In fact, most people breathe at

about 20% of their full capacity. We may take it for granted, but the breath is an integral part of fueling our biological system and feeding our cells, moving and clearing away toxins, renewing our life-force energy, and becoming more conscious and alive. It has the ability to simultaneously invigorate and relax us (like a good massage can).

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! It starts with a conscious focus on breath. The human body is a self-correcting mechanism and is continually regenerating itself. Our capacity to regenerate is far beyond what most of us experience as our reality. And using the breath for self-healing is absolutely one key.



Next, it's important to drink a lot of **water**—especially after a massage—since one of the most important benefits of massage is to reduce accumulated toxins. Drinking water flushes and rids the system of toxins released during deep-tissue work. Like motor oil keeping an automobile running smoothly, water is the simple lubricant that is critical to a smooth-functioning system.

Where water is present, life abounds. The body is composed of 70% water and most systems in our body absolutely rely on hydration to function properly. But by the time you feel thirsty, your body may already be seriously dehydrated! One simple habit worth developing is to drink a glass of water first thing in the morning (before consuming anything else), which helps

“prime the pump” and allow all the systems of the body to work together better.

Our body constantly gives us indications for what it is needing. Many times a headache is a reminder to drink more water, and the headache may go away just as simply. Often we can mistake a hunger reflex for what is really early-stage dehydration. So, especially if you like the idea of eating less (with less effort) consider having a glass of water instead of helping yourself to calories. It may just satisfy that overactive sense of appetite, as well as contribute to better digestion.

Keep in mind that, since excessive water dilutes digestive enzymes, it's important to drink plenty of water thirty minutes prior to a meal, rather than during. This reduces the tendency to overeat and allows hydration to support the digestion system during a meal. People ask, “Why water instead of juice, soda pop or even herbal tea?” Water goes directly into the bloodstream and absorbs very quickly to support all the systems in the body. Adding anything else to water involves a more complex process to assimilate, thus taking more energy and it can actually tax the system, especially if the liquid contains caffeine or alcohol (both diuretics), or lots of sugar. Clean, pure water is as simple as it gets.

**Stretching**—whether you enroll in a yoga class, or just stretch in simple ways as a quick fix for stress release—is the other thing that will improve your quality of life. It helps us stay



flexible (physically yes, but also mentally and emotionally) and is very relaxing.

Most people carry stress in their shoulders.

A simple side-to-side stretching of the neck 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. Inhale and reach up with your right hand to the top of your head, and with a big exhale, pull your head down gently towards your right shoulder. Hold for a few slow, deep breaths. With every exhale, gently pull it a little more toward your shoulder, stretching the left side.

As you stretch, tilting your head slightly to the front and back can target different specific neck muscles that need stretching. Now alternate to the other side, reversing hand positions (right hand behind your back), reaching to the top of your head with your left hand, repeating the stretch. Remember to focus on your breath during stretching for optimal oxygenation, relaxation and overall benefit.

The other stretch I often recommend, which seems to make the biggest difference for most people—is a version of “touch your toes” except with NO attempt or effort to actually reach the floor. Instead, it's about coming to rest wherever is most comfortable according to your present ability. The idea is to REST in a stretch and let gravity do the work. Remember to

BREATHE before you begin and throughout every stretching exercise, especially the stretches where your lungs are naturally contracted by the position of the stretch itself.

Here's how it goes: Stand up straight with feet shoulder-width apart. Start with your neck and lower your body down one vertebra at a time. Slowly bend forward until you are resting in a natural and comfortable bent-over position with arms relaxed, hanging loosely down toward the ground. Inhale, and with every exhale, let yourself relax even more into this stretch. Then, when you're ready, come back up to a straight position very slowly, again one vertebra at a time. This stretches everything from the Achilles tendons, calves, hamstrings, back, neck and shoulders. If you have any concerns due to injuries or other limitations, it's important for you to

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### **3 Simple Ways to Change Your Life**

consult a professional before beginning any stretching routine.

I also suggest stretching after a hot bath or shower since the muscles are warmed and this will provide optimal results.

Medical science has come a long way and can accomplish virtual miracles in many areas these days. But rather than approach wellness with a preventative or holistic approach, traditional western medicine still tends to label and address symptoms and point toward possibilities. I believe that stress and stored toxins are the two major causes of most dysfunctions in the body.

This is why I strongly recommend these three simple aids (and massage) as preventative therapies—after all, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

Henry David Thoreau once said, “Our lives are frittered away by detail. Simplify! Simplify!” Make your lifestyle improvements easy and you will actually do them! You may not necessarily need an elaborate exercise program. Start with a few minutes a day. The simplest changes can make the biggest difference! My favorite motto is, “Do the sim-

plest thing first in case it works!”

You always have time for the things you put first. So, as the holidays seem to pull you in every direction, remember to take time to do the little things that can make a difference. Take care of yourself. Slow down. Make quiet spaces in your day.

If you feel stressed, take a few breaths, slow your breathing down and refocus your inhalation down into your belly. Drink a glass of pure cool water (add a twist of lemon perhaps to alkalinize your system), and do a few nurturing stretches. Let these simple steps help you feel more centered and clear. This Thanksgiving and through to the New Year, remember to be grateful for the abundance that IS your life! ■

*Pamela Berger is a licensed massage therapist specializing in deep tissue thera-*



*peutic massage. She also offers CranioSacral Therapy, Swedish and intuitive energy techniques.*

*For testimonials, go to HeartHandsHealingTouch.com. Located at 521 West Lamme Street in Bozeman, Pamela can be reached at 522-5476, or by e-mail at mizmontana@juno.com.*