

Touched

(This article was inspired by the book 'Job's Body' by Deane Juhan who specializes in Trager Therapy.)

The touch of a soft sweater against your skin, freshly warm from the dryer on a cold winter day. Heavenly!

Touch is the mother of all senses and both a noun and a verb. As a word, it is a challenger for the record when it comes to having the most thesaurus entries. Like brush, caress, cuddle, embrace, and feel. Or pat, pet, rub, scratch and stroke. Or nudge. Or poke.

It can produce in us a myriad of reactions- pleasure or pain, arousal or annoyance. Touch is the first sense established in the developing embryo. Long before we can see or hear or smell or taste, we can respond to touch. Sensory input from the skin informs the central nervous system, guiding its development, maintenance and evolution. If an infant is deprived of touch they will waste away and die. Adults who are denied human contact suffer emotional and cognitive impairment.

Touch is woven into the fabric of human life and culture. And it has a very important role to play in our health care. Touch is the most basic form of communication between living things and it raises the fact that each party both gets and gives information. A hands-on approach to examination and treatment of neuromusculoskeletal complaints is indispensable. When your health care provider palpates your body they are assessing the temperature and tension and texture and turgor of your tissues, determining the play and extensibility of your joints and muscles and tendons.

While the practitioner gains vital information on the patient's health status, the patient gets information on the practitioner's personality, attentiveness, compassion and skill.

When it comes to your health and well-being, hands on professionals (doctors of chiropractic and traditional Chinese medicine, medical doctors, naturopaths, massage therapists, physiotherapists and others) can provide invaluable care. A healing touch causes oxytocin to be released from the pituitary gland. This hormone plays a role in forming social bonds – cementing the ties that bind us.

Touch is a powerful thing. It can incite profound relaxation, calm jangled nerves, reassure an injured child, excite our senses and soothe our souls. We can all benefit from the care of healing hands.

Submitted by Dr. Dawn Armstrong, B.Sc., D.C.

This article appeared in the Spring 2014 issue of the Comox Valley Health and Recreation Guide <http://www.comoxhealthandrecguide.com/>