



## AGING TODAY

# Power of Touch in a Pandemic

By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions



I remember a silly riddle from my boyhood: What do men do standing up, women do sitting down, and a dog does on three legs? I'll add the 2020 hint: **Fauci said it may never come back. The handshake of course.**

As I acknowledge the possibility that future generations may be stumped by this riddle, sadly I also recognize that as a society we are experiencing touch deprivation. In times of strife, a pat on the hand or a gentle hug can communicate, "I feel your pain, I see you. I understand what you are going through," greater than words alone. In the present state of uncertainty, the closeness we crave is the pandemic's forbidden fruit.

The healing power of physical touch can be measured. Doctors have found, through laboratory tests such as MRIs, that there are evident changes in the patterns of brain activity during touch. A great big bear hug can increase hormones associated with pleasure such as endorphins and oxytocin and decrease stress hormones such as cortisol. Physical touch can help elevate mood, enhance your ability to fight infection, and even help you sleep better.

For those who are riding out the pandemic in isolation, this information is not meant to rub salt into the festering wound of being physically distant. Engaging in self-care to mimic the physical touch is also beneficial. It is empowering to bolster your connection with your own physical self.

Here are a few instructions for self-massage:

**UPPER BACK SELF MASSAGE:** Take a tennis ball and place it in the bottom of a sock. Flip it over your shoulder and lean back against the wall, with the ball situated in that section between the shoulder blade and spine. Move your back around, with squats or hip adjustments, and the ball will follow, deep breaths will also add massage, because it widens the ribcage.

**FOOT MASSAGE:** The feet support your entire body, so keeping them in good shape helps you maintain balance and posture. Rolling a tennis ball under your foot putting pressure on the ball when it meets the arch. Keep a ball under your desk so that you can roll out your foot out when you jump on your computer.

**NECK MASSAGE:** Interlock your fingers and use your thumbs in circular motions. Use a good body lotion or massage oil so that your touch stays light.

**SHOWER:** In the shower, use a loofah, long-handled brush, or soaps with exfoliants in them. These seemingly routine practices can move the skin and save it from being deprived of stimulation.

Stretching, taking baths, using warm moist heat packs can also simulate touch.

I am heartbroken thinking of our isolated elderly who have not been able to hug their children and grandchildren. I treasure the memories I have of visiting my Granny, at least once a week. Our visits began and ended with a long embrace with Granny saying every time, "You give the best hugs." And I was thinking the same about her.



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