

Abdominal Massage (AbdM)

At WLC, I use Abdominal Massage (AbdM) as a pleasant treatment in its own right, an adjunct approach to use with IBS, bloating, weight loss/ management.

Or as a pre-treatment for around 10-15 minutes before the main colonics treatment.

The use of AbdM has two main indications.

1. When it is evident from initial palpation of the abdomen that the abdomen and colon are tight, tense and stressed. [Remember that the enteric nervous system (ENS) is a prime candidate for stress buildup]
2. When there is sharply reduced peristaltic function (the colons' wavelike movement for shifting waste through the colon).

This is something that affects many clients attending the clinic.

AbdM works by stimulating the colon reflexes and activating the muscles that control the peristalsis movement of the colon.

Whilst AbdM can be conducted in different ways, a standard run-through the AbdM process might involve:

With the client lying face down, the first few minutes of the massage introduces the massage to the body across the back, shoulders, neck through the freshly laundered gown provided for their individual use.

The client is invited to turn over and made comfortable (if needed a small cushion is placed behind the head). The towels are arranged so that the stomach is left covered. The massage begins with a very gentle and light massage of the stomach in circular movements.

After a few minutes the same soft sweeping strokes become a little deeper, working into the abdominal muscles more, stretching them slightly. All the while very slow movements are used which are unlikely to cause any discomfort/ pain.

The massage movement then flows into a circular motion around the stomach, following the contours and flow of the colon, ie descending, transverse and ascending colon. Slow flowing movements continue, however a little deeper and more powerful.

The massage then works deeper in a smaller area, gently probing the contours of the colon itself with gentle movements.

Focus on mapping the colon can be the significant portion of the treatment.

For those who would like a more technical description of the massage.

It involves:

Stroking: This starts at the small of the back and followed the dermatome of the vagus nerve, over the iliac crests, and down both sides of the pelvis towards the groin. It is repeated several times;

Effleurage: Strokes follow the direction of the ascending colon across the transverse colon and down the descending colon. This is repeated several times with increased pressure to stimulate the austral and segmental contractions of the large intestine. The aim is to propel the faecal matter along the gut;

Palmar kneading: In my approach I use this *optionally*, tracking down the descending colon, up the ascending colon, and down the descending colon once again. Kneading helps to propel the faecal matter along the gut to load the rectum. Finger kneading may be required to break up faecal mass

I usually find that effleurage works well by itself.

If and when I use kneading, I ensure effleurage is repeated and continued with a relaxing transverse stroke over the abdomen;

Vibration: Over the abdominal wall to relieve flatulence. This concludes the massage session.

About abdominal massages / colonic massages

I am commenting on specific benefits of '*Abdominal Massage*' in the context of *colonics*.

The abdomen houses vital organs responsible for digestion, reproduction and elimination. The digestive system and eliminative system is prone to weakness. This can happen through illness, or by not exercising enough and living a sedentary lifestyle.

Abdominal Massage aids in proper digestion and relieves constipation. Colonic massage also stimulates the illeocecal valve, (which is the valve between the small and large intestine). The illeocecal valve allows solid waste to move from the small intestine into the colon, for excretion. Stimulating this valve helps ensure that solid waste products are excreted in a timely fashion, so that toxins don't build up in the body.

By strengthening weak and relaxed abdominal muscles, it can take strain off of the lower back. A massage can release deep muscle tissue spasms and help align pelvic bones.

This helps the digestive system a lot. Abdominal massage also helps when one is trying to detoxify.

Massage in this area improves the oxygenated blood supply to organs. This stimulates the liver, gall bladder and pancreas allowing the release of metabolic waste products.

So, it's strongly recommended that one have an abdominal massage when on a colon cleansing program.

Applied pressure with gentle circular motion can also release deep muscle spasms, promote internal heat and break down adhesions or scar tissue.

Gender specific benefits:

For women- this massage has shown to alleviate painful periods and ovulation. It is also helpful in correcting irregular menstrual cycles and easing symptoms of PMS. (There are even studies showing that abdominal massage can be helpful with the symptoms of endometriosis). It aligns the uterus and pelvic bone to their proper positions

For men- The abdominal massage ensures full blood circulation to the prostate and prevents swelling and inflammation. Abdominal massage has also shown to help alleviate the need to urinate frequently.

Any one who has a "knot in the gut" feeling (stress and anxiety) would benefit from abdominal massage

To summarise, generalized benefits

- Increases blood flow within the abdomen to increase oxygen to the organs
- Relieves anxiety
- Relaxes tension in the muscles surrounding the colon
- Helps dislodge built up fecal matter from intestinal walls
- Stimulates the body's natural detoxification process
- The touch therapy aspect of abdominal massage provides soothing heat and comfort
- Male & female gender related benefits as above.
- Releases emotional tension of different kinds (we hold 'stuff' in the gut)
- Help clear up acne and lead to healthier, more youthful looking skin.

Performing Abdominal (Colonic) Massage; for oneself

In between visits to a colonic massage/ hydro therapist to receive a colonic massage, you can easily and safely massage your own abdomen at home.

I highly recommend it. You'll need space to lie down, (a thick yoga mat works well, or even carpeted floor space) and you'll need some massage oil.

Apply the massage oil to your abdomen. Start with your fingers on the right side of your abdomen, at the base of the ribs, near the appendix.

Use firm, but gentle, pressure and move your fingers in a circular motion, clockwise, toward the ribcage. Once you reach the ribcage, move your fingers across the abdomen (massage with circular motions) under the ribs until you reach your left side. Once you've reached your left side, move down toward the lower abdomen, massaging all the while. Massage across the lower abdomen and then back up to where you began; continue the massage in concentric circles (ie smaller and smaller circles) until you've massaged your entire abdomen.

How much pressure to apply? I suggest starting with light pressure. You may gradually increase the amount of pressure you apply during the massage until you reach your maximum comfort level. Pay attention to any tender spots and use less pressure there. Remember more pressure isn't necessarily better. Feather light

strokes work great, and are really comforting. In Ayurveda, massage is described as an act of self-love, and I think that's a great descriptor of the attitude that's most helpful when you massage yourself.

Your massage could last 10 to 20 minutes. Afterward, drink plenty of water to help flush out toxins.

Abdominal massage- the research findings

For those who like to establish research credentials for assertions made, I am citing McClurg & Lowe-Strong; specifically their 2011 double-blind, peer reviewed research review article ('Does abdominal massage relieve constipation?').

This article concluded that abdominal massage can relieve constipation of various physiological causes. It stimulates peristalsis, decreases colonic transit time and increases the frequency of bowel movements. It also reduces discomfort and pain, induces relaxation and improves quality of life. No adverse effects have ever been reported.

Mechanism of action?

They say abdominal massage is thought to encourage rectal loading (ie movement of stool along the length of the colon towards the exit) by increasing intra-abdominal pressure.

In neurological cases, it can produce rectal waves that stimulate bowel sensation. This is medical language. What does it mean? Simply that abdominal massage can be of benefit to people with constipation, even when it coexists with neurological problems like multiple sclerosis.

What is the most effective technique? There is debate about the amount of pressure that should be applied. I believe in *less* rather than *more*. In my view the effect is due to a combination of sensory stimulation and relaxation, rather than stool being manually propelled along the digestive tract.

Can massage be self-administered?

Most patients in the study by McClurg et al undertook the massage themselves. Although some found self-massage tiring, they liked the self-efficacy. (McClurg et al, 2011).