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A Massage Therapist's Tool Chest with Regard to Breath

Perhaps the most meaningful work we do around breath is not related specifically to named pathologies. Breathing is vital, essential, and fully entwined with state of being. Helping our clients to breathe well and to take advantage of the effects of breath on psychological and physical states is an enormous contribution to their health and well-being. Some thoughts on massage and breath...

- We can bring our knowledge of specific conditions to bear and only massage when it will not exacerbate symptoms.
- Noticing our clients' breathing can help us assess their current state and response to massage.
- Enhancing clients' awareness of existing breathing patterns – and possibilities for breathing more fully – can help clients develop more functional breathing patterns.
 - Awareness can be enhanced verbally or non-verbally. My preference is for non-verbal support through touch and/or entrainment.
 - Touch can include gentle pressure to bring awareness to movement that is already occurring and/or gentle pressure to suggest movement that might occur.
 - We can use entrainment and resonance to create invitations to clients to breathe more fully or at a different rate than usual. This involves changing our own breathing patterns or matching our breathing to the client's breath and gradually changing the pattern.
- We can change a client's position to enhance ease of breathing.

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- We can employ massage/pressure/touch to specific muscles to enhance capacity for breathing. Remember: Muscle relaxation and normalization of muscle tone enables muscular performance. Ease is key in breathing fully. Often, “trying” to breathe is counterproductive.
 - Make use of techniques for accessing the Diaphragm, Pectoralis minor, SCM, Scalenes, Serratus Posterior, and Intercostals.
 - The Diaphragm, as a muscle that works constantly, is prone to trigger point formation.
- We can employ techniques like cupping and other percussive strokes to dislodge mucous that is interfering with the breath.
- Percussion also sometimes promotes awareness of sensation within the lungs and chest, which can stimulate coughing even without presence of excess mucous. While producing coughing in our clients is not usually part of the goal of a relaxing massage 😊, it can nonetheless be part of the process of clients gaining awareness and hitting the “reset” button with respect to breaths that are more full than usual.
- Slow, attentive, diagonally-oriented work around the torso/thorax and along fascial lines can create opportunity for myofascial freedom, which in turn facilitates more ease and fullness in breathing.