

Tender touch

After a deep and painful biopsy to remove a benign cyst, Debra Curties's breast was bruised, swollen and hard. All it took to relieve her discomfort was a few sessions of breast massage. The experience inspired Curties, a massage therapist and executive director of the Sutherland-Chan School & Teaching Clinic in Toronto, to publish her own book on the technique – and to become an advocate for breast massage for women and a source of information for massage therapists.

How it's done

While a woman lies on her back, the breasts, chest, armpits and neck are gently massaged. It's normal to feel hesitant or nervous at first, explains Pam Fichtner, a registered massage therapist and owner of Sephira Healing Centre in Vancouver. "A lot of women feel really shy about it," she adds. This is mostly due to the societal taboo that keeps women from knowing their breasts. Others fear that the therapist might find a cancerous lump. Fichtner puts her clients at ease by using draping techniques that expose only one breast at a time. Some women prefer to wear a thin T-shirt.

Sara Sexton, a registered massage therapist and president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Massage Therapists Association, says she requests that her patients give written consent before they receive a breast, abdomen or inner thigh massage. This ensures that no massaging touch will be misconstrued as sexual.

Who benefits?

Expectant or nursing mothers may find their breasts less tender after mas-

sage. It also helps to soothe post-surgical pain, radiation damage or the routine discomfort that some women feel during their menstrual cycles. Other women count on breast massage to relieve chronically sore, lumpy fibrocystic breasts. Breast massage seems to work by promoting circulation, which in turn speeds healing. And taking off a tight bra can be helpful in itself.

Acceptance is growing among massage therapists and patients. Curties finds that once women have tried breast massage, they often say, "Oh, this is great! I can't believe I was massaged for this many years without getting my breasts done." **JULIE McCANN**



If you experience painful breasts, you may find that a breast massage can be comforting and healing.

DIY BREAST MASSAGE

If you're feeling too shy to get a breast massage, you can always do it yourself. Or have your partner pitch in. The key to a great breast massage is gentle movement, says Debra Curties. Here's how to do it:

- **Remove your bra and sit up or lie on your back.**
- **Relax and breathe slowly.**
- **Curve your hand and, using your fingertips, massage all of the breast tissue in a circular motion for a few minutes. Then cup the underside of your breast and move it in all directions using a gentle bouncing motion.**
- **Remember, breast tissue is soft and doesn't require a lot of pressure.**
- **Switch sides and repeat.**
- **Massage your neck, chest area and armpits, too.**
- **Afterwards, rotate your shoulders and swing your arms in all directions for a minute or two.**

To order Debra Curties's book, *Breast Massage* (Curties-Overzet), call 1/888/649-5411.

