

Gentle products for soothing massages

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Wellness and cosmetic treatments – both are unimaginable without massages! The customer longs for relaxation and expects the promised results. Professional competence is required here – and the appropriate media in form of creams, oils and gels.

Movement implies life. In terms of the human body, this applies for its entirety but as well as for the microcosm of the connective tissue and the individual cells. Massages – as much as sports – help to exercise and activate body cells and reinforce the metabolism. The microcirculation in blood vessels just as the transport of oxygen and nutrients get into top gear. These effects can be so powerful that they even affect our sleep as for instance after a very intense massage of the extremities following a long flight.

There are different types of pressure and strokes when giving a massage. Hands may stroke, rub, knead, tap or apply vibrations. Adequate tools to intensify the effects are brushes, hot stones, herb stamps and sometimes even direct body contact. Hot stones are particularly soothing and as successful in loosening tensions as a hard manual massage – in this case the wellness aspect of the massage takes effect. Herb stamps are a science for their own and can be used in the cosmetic field as well as medical area.

Aqueous media based on hydrogels and emulsions allow gently gliding strokes on the skin. Oils and oleogels (lipogels) are non-aqueous alternatives. There is a general rule though: if gloves are used for hygienic reasons it has to be made sure that they are compatible with the massage medium. Softening agents or latex components should not be transferred to the skin. Sensitive individuals can develop undesired secondary reactions.

For a smooth treatment

Especially oils should have an adequate consistency or in other words, be not too liquid and spread too easily. They should form a steady film between hands and skin that transmits external pressure and stroke stimuli adequately and in a gentle way. This can be achieved by adhesive additives like castor oil or 12-hydroxystearic acid ester. Oils and waxes rich in phytosterols like avocado oil and shea butter are adequate complementary substances here.

Preferred base oils are almond and grape seed oil. As a matter of fact, many other vegetable oils also are appropriate^{a)}. Attention should be paid to the fatty acid composition of the triglycerides and also to the natural content of vitamins and phytosterols. Rose hip seed oil e.g. has a well-balanced content of linoleic (ω -6-acid) and alpha-linolenic acid (ω -3-acid) which both guarantee an excellent skin care effect. Unsaturated oils which are sensitive to sun radiation and oxygen should preferably be used in the evenings unless they contain antioxidants.

When vegetable oils are combined with magnesium or zinc salts of long chained fatty acids, solid to semi-liquid oleogels will form. They are appropriate media for the local massage around the eye socket, the décolleté or the legs. Additional penetration supporting substances like phosphatidylcholine take care of an excellent absorption and still enhance the skin care effects. They markedly reduce the oily glimmer and the unpleasant fatty sensation after the massage.

And for the second serving – skin care

As a matter of fact, paraffin oils and even silicon oils and their oleogels can also be used for massages. It should be mentioned though, that they have no skin caring effects, remain on the skin surface and have to be removed after the treatment.

Cleansing is facilitated if the oils contain tenesides. Moist and warm compresses or a shower will then be entirely sufficient to remove the oils right away and without residues. Nevertheless, the skin will lose natural lipid and barrier components which have to be substituted after the cleansing; recommended in this context is a physiologically formulated body lotion.

Besides water, hydrogels only contain polymer consistency regulators as e.g. sodium carboxymethylcellulose^{b)} similar to the ultrasound gels. A certain cooling effect which occurs with the use of hydrogels due to the inevitable evaporation of water is disadvantageous though. When hydrogels dry on the skin, they become sticky or

crumbly unless the surface is moistened with lukewarm water in due time.

On the other hand, hydrogels can easily be mixed with aqueous extracts and water soluble active agents. Particularly polysaccharides like xanthan, hyaluronic acid and algae extracts including alginic acid hydrolysates can be used to retain the skin hydration, or provide plumping and soothing effects. When it comes to massaging the upper leg areas in order to treat cellulite problems or applying partial ultrasound treatments, hydrogels with liposomal caffeine or liposome concentrates in combination with green tea extracts have proved successful. They mobilize fat deposits and increase the microcirculation.

Just cast a glance at the labels

As hydrogels contain a considerable amount of water, the preservative issue should also be addressed in this context. Apparently inexpensive preparations^{c)} cannot be recommended if they contain preservatives with sensitizing potential (see supplement, German Cosmetic Decree). But also preservative free formulations with an appreciable content of glycerin, glycols or sugar alcohols as e.g. sorbitol are on the market. They can be removed with warm and damp compresses after the treatment. Accidentally remaining hydrogel rests will not bother though. On the contrary: they support the skin hydration. Afterwards, lipid enriched skin care creams can be applied.

A convenient combination of hydrogels and skin care creams are massage creams. As the mechanical impact of the massage causes an intense absorption of the creams, it is also recommended to throw a glance on the INCI. Perfumes may involve tolerance problems. A well-balanced addition of essential oil is the better alternative anyway. There are no objections against emulsifiers like mono and diglycerides or lecithin (phospholipid mixture). They comply with the physiology of the skin. Emulsifier free creams like Derma Membrane Structure (DMS) can be adapted with individual active agents and added to a following fleece pack^{d)}.

If the massage is part of a facial treatment, the application of DMS without additional active agents is not recommended before the facial mask due to the intense absorption. A combination of DMS and active agent concentrates, however, allows a highly effective massage and may simultaneously be used as a following relaxing mask^{e)}.

Value added treatment

Besides the appropriate selection of prepara-

tions, also the adequate choice of active agent additives is an important topic in connection with massages. With the addition of essential oils, balms and extracts, the full potential of aromatherapy can be made use of. As the passage into the body does not occur through the medium water as e.g. while bathing, it is recommended to start with small dosages. Essential oils are not only effective via dermal absorption but also via olfactory stimuli. This applies for calming as well as relaxing variants. The selection of the adequate media like cooling oils as e.g. menthol or warming substances like vanillin ether, ginger or chili depends on the treatment. Horse chestnut for instance is used to improve the microcirculation during foot massages. Mountain arnica is known for its decongestant effects. Essential fatty acids, frankincense, betulin and echinacea extracts are recommended for sun damaged skin and erythema. Chamomile and calendula have calming effects. The vitamins A, B, C and co-enzyme Q10 as well as tea preparations are adequate agents to stimulate the metabolism of atrophic skin.

Sera with urea and willow bark extract are applied if a gentle peeling effect is desired. Urea, amino acids and protein hydrolysates complement the cream massage of the dry skin. They increase the NMF and are an excellent protection against atmospheric radicals. Tightening effects for instance are achieved with kigelia, horsetail or phytohormones gained from soybeans or red clover. An appropriate agent against small facial wrinkles is paracress for example. It should be pointed out, that also in this context only small initial doses are recommended for massages.

It should also be mentioned that there are active agents that are not tolerated by all skin types. There are also contraindications for massages. Massage treatments should be avoided if the skin is inflamed or, in spite of the regular hygienic measures, if there is a risk that germs may spread and infect further skin areas, as e.g. in acne cases. The same applies for skin alterations that are suspicious for melanoma. Skin with damaged connective tissue (rosacea/couperosis) can also be a problem. It is recommended to be very cautious here and gently tap the active agents into the skin.

Essences and aromas

Fresh or dried herbs and vegetable drugs can be bound into herb stamps. The active agents are then released into the massage medium, a method which can be compared with the maceration process. This technique implies that the active agent dosage can be controlled

through the length of the treatment. In the head, facial and body massages following the traditions of ayurveda or yamu principles, the energy points of the body are massaged with the fingertips. The thus released relaxation effects can reach as far as into particular internal organs and correct malfunctions. There are also active agent enriched oils that have to be prepared in elaborate processes right before the massage. They have to be applied at a relatively hot temperature.

For those contemporaries indulging in wellness and partner massages, there is meanwhile a broad supply of well-tasting and pleasantly scented massage media, starting from vegetable oils with vanilla, gingerbread and chocolate aroma via wine and honey up to hot chocolate. And there is a lot of talk about de-

toxification and purification. Nevertheless, the emphasis here is rather on the fun part.

Dr. Hans Lautenschläger

Notes not included in the original publication:

- a) Partner massage: As a rule, massage oils are not compatible with condoms – especially when they contain essential oils.
- b) Hydrogels can also be used as glide gels.
- c) Medical preparations often are not GCD compliant (German Cosmetic Decree).
- d) DMS used in combination with fleece packs can be diluted with lukewarm water
- e) The effects of the relaxing mask can even be improved when covered with an occlusive, hardening facial mask which then is removed in one single piece.