

# Body Sculpting

## With Abdominal Packs

by Anne C. Willis, L.E., C.M.E.

**H**umans have long been exposed to toxic substances, but today's exposure to contaminants far exceeds that of previous times. A higher rate of conditions related to inflammation and excessive toxicity are overburdening our bodies, resulting in a variety of emotional disturbances, digestive imbalances and an overall decline in health. For example, studies by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases ([www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)) indicate that a growing number of people are suffering from an increase in fatigue and irritability.

Our bodies normally produce toxins that are byproducts of metabolism, called endotoxins. Endotoxins are part of the cell wall, and are released in large quantities when certain bacteria are released upon destruction of a cell. These self-produced toxins cause irritation and inflammation throughout our bodies. If not eliminated, these endotoxins can irritate and inflame our tissues, affecting normal functions.

"[T]oxins are inevitably generated within us as result of what we eat, drink and breathe, and the bits of bad stuff this generates need to be either eliminated through the feces, sweat, urine or via pulmonary exhalation, or else they need to be conjugated by the liver, and thus rendered harmless," Nicholas Corrin, L.Ac., wrote in



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his article, “Endotoxins: Homocysteine Dangers Resulting From Faulty Metabolism” ([www.eclectichealing.com](http://www.eclectichealing.com)).

“However, our innate conjugation and elimination systems are not up to the task of dealing with all the massive toxic overload we face today,” Corrin continued. Antibodies formed to protect us against the harmful effects of endotoxins often trigger a systemic effect, causing an autoimmune reaction, so the body begins fighting itself.

Changes in the human condition should invite practitioners to rethink how they handle the body. A new approach for assisting the body in the removal of toxins should be introduced early in sessions. This can be achieved through localized detoxification treatments, so the body can more easily heal itself.

A good place to start is to confirm the effects toxins have on the body. This can be determined when a client complains of regularly experiencing multiple adverse conditions at once, especially when those conditions become the norm. If the norm for your client is distress and dis-ease, it may be an indication that his body is overloaded with toxins. (Of course, massage therapists may not diagnose, and if there is any suspicion of a health condition requiring medical attention, the appropriate referral must be made.)

In such instances, the client should complement lifestyle changes with bodywork that includes subtle, holistic detoxification methods. These methods allow the body to return to self-regulation, thus allowing it to release toxicity more slowly and to repair at a rate it can manage.

### Abdominal packs

The subtle, holistic detoxification methods I experienced during my training at the Nisargopchar Ashram, in Maharashtra, India, were always incorporated along with other healing modalities. Many of these therapies allowed the body to release toxins through gradual release processes; however, I received the same protocol almost every day, which proved to overwhelm my body. Although these protocols have been implemented to heal and cure for thousands of years, I realized that what might have been appropriate

for our Eastern friends is not necessarily beneficial for individuals living a Western lifestyle.

Today, I offer treatment sessions that include a more holistic approach to detoxification. This approach includes abdominal packs applied in a series prior to massage. Abdominal packs assist with lymphatic waste removal, perhaps the body’s number-one method of detoxification. The center for all lymph filtration takes place at the lymph nodes, which are located throughout the body, with the largest number populating the gastrointestinal system. Therefore, applying abdominal packs to this region of the body can aid in lymph stagnation and redirect lymph obstruction.

Massage client Kathleen Raskin has received abdominal packs as a prelude to other healing therapies. “I noticed a reduction in belly bloating and an increase in energy that is welcome,” she says.

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An assessment technique that includes light pulsing invites the lymphatic system to begin a gentle flow. This technique should be administered in a relaxing, methodical application prior to applying the abdominal pack.

Abdominal packs can consist of herbal compounds and clays, which are applied directly to the skin of the abdominal area. Physiological effects and benefits will depend on the herbal composition applied. Mud is also a compound used in many traditional packs, and provides high mineral content for nutritional support as well as lymph flow.

The use of moist gauze applied over the pack prevents the herbal compounds from drying and allows them to stay active. With so much inflammation stored in the body, it is not recommended to use a heating pad; rather, a dry cloth that keeps the pack moist while drawing heat from the body is preferable. To receive the most favorable results, it is best to apply a minimum of three treatments over a seven- to 10-day period. Once a client has completed a series of abdominal packs, it can then be determined if massage can be introduced. If there is

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improvement to one's overall feeling of well-being after a series of abdominal packs, it would be advantageous to proceed with light massage.

Individuals can experience benefits including reduced bloating, abdominal pain, swelling and headaches; as well as a lighter, more bouncy spring to their walk. The abdomen will appear more sculpted—but the primary benefit is a more rhythmic lymph flow.



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**Detoxifying abdominal packs applied in conjunction with massage therapy can result in decreased bloating, swelling and abdominal pain. (A client before treatment is shown left, top and bottom; right, the client after treatment.)**

By activating the lymphatic system at the abdomen, clients will also experience firmer facial features. The facial skin will appear less bloated.

It is important to honor an individual's sensitivity to having her abdomen touched. Many people suffer from touch deprivation, and can be alarmed when certain areas of the body are touched. Asking your client to place her hands on her abdomen while you place your hands over her can be a lovely way to introduce your energy and touch. Always asking permission to touch or apply a product to an area of one's body shows grace and respect.

### Rewarding practice

In order for a massage therapist to be able to offer these treatments, he would need a thorough understanding of the anatomy and physiology of the lymphatic system. It would also be necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the products being used in the application of these treatments. As with all therapies, it is important to follow up with your client to ensure he is not experiencing any side effects from the abdominal packs. Document the treatments and results every step of the way.

Massage therapist Heidi Webber, L.M.T., of Chapter 1 Wellness in Sarasota, Florida, has incorporated abdominal packs, along with several modalities of massage, into her practice. "I love the slow release that the entire body experiences [with abdominal packs], says Webber. "To witness the calmness and peacefulness that comes over my clients makes administering the therapy joyful. I find the results to be immediate and the beginning aspects of healing more rewarding."

As we strive for healthier, more rewarding practices, exploring the evolution of holistic therapies can make our work more in keeping with what the public needs. This is the most exciting time to be a massage-and-spa practitioner, because we have the opportunity to foster a more creative viewpoint and provide treatments that meet the needs of our clients.

Anne C. Willis, L.E., C.M.E., is a licensed aesthetician and certified medical educator, the founder of De La Terre Skincare® ([www.delaterreskincare.com](http://www.delaterreskincare.com)) and an innovator in the world of holistic therapies. She is the director of Oncology Skin Therapeutics™ and is certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine and in the Dr. Vodder Method of Manual Lymph Drainage. M