

Massage Is the Message This Valentine's Day

(MPS) — This year, the perfect present for your valentine is not expensive, not fattening and is guaranteed to enhance the state of affairs. Best of all, it's right at your fingertips — a skin- and psyche-soothing massage.

It's easy. Make a coupon stating your intentions. Use anything red and white — doilies, construction paper, ribbons, heart stickers. Tie it to a bottle of light massage oil (Neutrogena Sesame Body Oil is the choice of many massage therapists) to hint at the wonderful things to come.

The gift of a loving touch sends an eloquent message on Valentine's Day or anytime, says Diane Johnson, R.N., a licensed massage and aromatherapist and "body worker" based in Los Angeles.

"Some people are reluctant to give their beloved a massage, because they think they have to know professional techniques, but there's really no way you can go wrong if the massage comes from the heart," says Johnson. Nevertheless, a few professional pointers can help make the experience unforgettably romantic and one that both partners will want to repeat, making any day Valentine's Day.

First, says Johnson, it's very important to set the mood:

§ Choose quiet music that appeals both to the massage giver and recipient.

§ The room should be dimly lit, preferably with scented candles.

§ Make sure the room temperature is conducive to nudity.

§ Unplug the phone, send the kids to grandma's or wait until they are sound asleep, make sure the pets aren't hungry — do anything it takes to prevent interruptions.

§ One or both partners can take a bubble bath first to warm the muscles.

When it comes to giving the massage itself, use a good, light oil for the requisite "slip and glide" of the hands, as well as for special skin and aromatherapy benefits. According to the "Complete Book of Essential Oils and Aromatherapy," by Valerie Ann Worwood (New World Library, 1991), sesame oil is good for all skin types and contains vitamins, minerals, proteins and amino acids. Johnson likes Neutrogena Sesame Body Oil. "It is light and absorbs easily into the skin with no greasy feeling. It also has a lovely, subtle jasmine-like aroma." She recom-

mends placing a bottle of Neutrogena Sesame Body Oil in a bowl of hot water to bring it to a comfortable, seductive temperature.

You also can customize your valentine's massage, says Johnson, by adding a few drops of a favorite perfume or essential oil (lavender and citrus scents are especially popular) to the fragrance-free version of Neutrogena Body Oil. Pour the body oil into a separate container, and mix in a few drops.

With the warm oil in your hands, gently stroke the back from the base of the spine up to the shoulders. Always stroke towards the heart, advises Johnson.

"Most importantly, communicate with your partner," says Johnson. "Ask if the pressure is good for him or her, and chances are that it will be."



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