

Touch – The first of our senses to experience at birth.

It remains emotionally important throughout our lives. And while touch can be negative, abusive, or violating – **positive touch** is essential to so many areas of our lives. We are hard-wired for physical touch. It reminds us we are all human, says Dr. Mintle.

However, for the past three years, we have been restricted in our touch due to the pandemic. Hugs, kisses, and gestures of affection were all put on hold. We could not put our arm around someone who was grieving, have grandkids jump in our laps, or even greet one another with a handshake.

LESSON LEARNED – one thing that became very clear from the pandemic – we took touch for granted. The loss of touch contributed to feeling lonely; and the increase of online communication did not help. You **cannot substitute the warmth** of a pat on the back or a hug of joy.

We need physical touch in our development and in our ongoing relationships. We know that a lack of touch results in growth deprivation and developmental delays. Additionally, without positive touch people get more aggressive. Touch calms you down, says Dr. Mintle.

Positive touch can lower blood pressure, help memory, and improve emotions. It can decrease stress, help with pain, and boost our immune system, according to therapist Michell Traut. Touch has also been shown to lower irritability and depression in those with dementia. She found that just holding a dementia patient's hand lowers their shoulders (because they relax more) and gives some relief to their feelings of deprivation and abandonment.

As we think about the importance of touch, we remember how Christ physically touched people he healed. It should be no surprise that the God who designed our bodies would place importance on human touch while on earth. Throughout Christ's time in ministry, he physically touched people and his touch was given even to those who were "untouchable", like lepers and the religiously "unclean". His physical touch was an affirmation of a person's value and dignity despite their condition.

The language of touch is scattered throughout the Bible. Physically and spiritually, we need God's touch. When we are touched by God, we are changed. Bitterness, unforgiveness, anxiety and fear go away.

Jesus tells us his touch will bring comfort and joy! He pulls us close to him and invites us to sit on his knee like children.

So, let's open our hearts to both physical and spiritual touch that is safe and positive. It will change us for the better!

*Notes taken from Faith Radio, Dr. Linda Mintle
Interview with Michalle Traut, Certified Massage Therapist*

