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Mayo Clinic Studies The Healing Touch Of Massage



Reporting Donald Schaffer came to Mayo Clinic to have a heart valve replaced. **Dennis Douda** The massage he receives is a bonus after surgery that tends to leave patients muscles tight and sore.

"Cause when they spread the ribs it puts pressure back here on the joints and messes with all the muscol-skeletal issue right here in the shoulder," said a nurse who gave Schaffer a massage.

However, Schaffer was also treated to pre-surgical massage for a different kind of tension. He was understandably nervous about the surgery.

"Full of anxiety. Not knowing what we're getting into. Not knowing what the results are gonna be," said Schaffer.

As it was with the knots in his muscles, Schaffer said the anxiety also melted away with therapeutic massage. Mayo Clinic calls it their Healing Enhancement Program.

"What we've done is to try to look at all the needs of the patient," said heart surgeon Thor Sundt. He said there is no question that patients benefit at every stage of their treatment.

"Many patients feel more at peace, more settled, more comfortable. They're not as fearful when they go home," said Sundt.

Sundt said in the Mayo Clinic cardiac surgery unit they are studying whether massage therapy reduces a patient's pain, their anxiety level, whether they need fewer pain meds and whether they go home sooner. However, the bottom line is measured in a different way.

"Again, it's hard to sort of proven in dollars and cents, but the human value is very clear," said Sundt.

The Healing Enhancement Program's nurse leader is Sue Cutshall, who said there's no doubt the massage speeds recovery.

"I think they get back on their feet faster here in the hospital. They might be moving faster, feeling better, they're sleeping better, they might not have as much nausea," said Cutshall.

The healing benefits even extend to patient's spouses.

"It makes your whole body relax," said Schaffer's wife, Earlene.

The Mayo Auxiliary has trained volunteers to do Swedish Hand massage, which Earlene found eased her stress as well.

The Mayo Clinic expects to have results on its study of massage for heart patients in about six months. Patients who want to can also incorporate prayer and soothing music into their therapy.

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