

## Massage

Massage is one of the oldest of the healing arts and offers a drug-free, non-invasive, and humanistic approach working in concert with the body's own ability to heal itself. Its history can be traced back thousands of years to ancient Chinese, Hindu, Persian, and Egyptian civilizations and was well documented in Greek and Roman sources. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, was said to be a proponent of massage for joint and circulatory problems.

Here are some common uses of massage therapy:

- Relieves aches and pains from neck, shoulder, back muscles, and chronic ailments;
- Increases feelings of well-being;
- Relaxes tight, sore muscles;
- Helps circulation of blood and lymph;
- Improves immune system functioning;
- Restores energy and vitality;
- Reduces anxiety level.

Massage is not indicated for every type of human condition. When visiting a practitioner for the first time, it is important to give an accurate medical history. If there is a specific purpose to your visit, relaying that information to the massage therapist will allow the practitioner to tailor the technique he or she uses during the session for the client's maximum benefit.

There are several forms of massage that emphasize and highlight a variety of purposes and uses.

**Swedish massage** was developed in the late 18th century as the first systemic application of therapeutic massage in the West. Using long, slow strokes with superficial rubbing, kneading and compression, each manipulation is designed to have a specific benefit. Swedish massage helps shorten recovery time from muscle strain by flushing tissue of lactic and uric acid and other metabolic wastes; increases circulation without increasing heart load; stretches tendons and ligaments, keeping them supple; stimulates skin and nervous system; relieves connective tissue adhesion and reduces stress.

**Sports massage**, which became popular in recent years, is based on the premise that there are 12 principle body postures that form all athletic movement, and a recognition that each sport strains muscles at predictable points. This form of massage can assist in healing strained muscles and maintain peak activity in healthy muscles with less risk of injury.

**Medical massage** is beneficial in many different medical settings. Use of massage therapy helps patients reconnect with their bodies after invasive surgery. A study from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles indicates reduced pain and muscle spasms in patients receiving massage therapy after heart bypass surgery. Massage therapy used in conjunction with medical care can assist women experiencing lumpectomies, mastectomies, or breast reconstruction surgery. In a pre-operative setting, massage helps relax muscle tissue and increases lymph flow while post-operatively, lymph drainage massage techniques treat lymphedema, reducing pain and swelling by dispersing lymphatic fluid.

Here are some other common medical uses for massage therapy:

- Treats chronic low back pain;
- Prevents muscular atrophy associated with broken bones;
- Reduces inflammation in strains and sprains;
- Reduces inflammation of sciatica;
- Stimulates normal bowel movement;
- Assists in controlling pain, cancer-related fatigue, sleep disorders, high blood pressure, depression, eating disorders, diabetes, and immunity suppression.

**Chair massage** involves the client being fully clothed and seated in a special, forward-leaning chair. Even a 15-minuteworkout can re-energize, relax, and relieve muscle aches.

**Shiatsu** is a Chinese approach based on the circulation of Ch'i or energy, which runs throughout the body in meridians. Pressure is exerted on points similar to those used in acupuncture, where energy can be manipulated by the practitioner. This form of massage requires participation by the individual receiving the treatment in coordinating breath with manipulations.

**Lymph drainage massage** is used to mechanically assist the lymph system in disposal of protein wastes, which naturally collect between cells, ultimately causing pooling or edema. This form of massage is helpful after mastectomy or facelift surgeries. Because of the light, topical touch used in this form of massage, it can also be used for relaxation.

**Craniosacral massage** involves the head, neck and spine area to the sacrum, improving the function of the central nervous system and eliminating stress.

**Reiki** is also known as energy healing. This form of massage involves transference of positive energy from the practitioner to the client, facilitating healing in the body.

**Rolfing** is a deep massage technique used to realign body segments and is usually used in response to a chronic condition or in recovery from illness.

In recent years, Western medicine has come to recognize a connection between stress and disease. Some experts claim that between 80% and 90% of disease is stress-related. Bodywork or massage therapy takes comfort and healing qualities that human touch provides and helps us remember what stress-free living is all about.

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### **How to Get the Most From Your Massage**

(American Massage Therapy Association)

1. Be as receptive and open to the process as possible.
2. Do not eat just before a massage session.
3. Be on time. If you arrive in a frenzied, rushed state, it will take longer to get to a relaxed state.
4. If you do not want to remove all your clothing, wear clothing that you will be comfortable wearing during the massage and will allow the massage therapist to touch and move the areas of your body you expect will need to be worked on.
5. Give the massage therapist accurate health information.
6. Good communication is very important. Before the session, let your massage therapist know what your needs are. During the massage session, report any discomfort, whether it is from the massage or due to any problems or distractions related to the environment, e.g., room temperature, music volume, lighting, etc. Feel free to give feedback to the massage therapist regarding the massage, e.g., amount of pressure, speed of movement, etc.
7. Don't be afraid to discuss any apprehension or concerns. It is important that you be as comfortable as possible during your massage.
8. Some massage therapists like to play music during the massage session and may have music especially composed for relaxation and other effects. Others may find music distracting. Let your massage therapist know if you have any preferences regarding music if it is available.
9. Some people like to talk during a massage session, while others remain silent. If your massage therapist encourages you to talk or not talk, it is usually based on whether or not it seems to help let go of tension and getting in touch with oneself. Sometimes talking can be a way of unburdening oneself or opening up. Sometimes being silent can be a way of letting go of thoughts or concentrating. On the other hand, talking can be a way of "being in the head" and out of touch with one's body or feelings; and being silent can be a way of holding back or not opening up.
10. Breathing helps to facilitate relaxation. People often stop or limit their breaths when they feel anxious or a sensitive area is massaged. If you realize you are stopping your breathing, let yourself breathe.
11. Tightening up (contracting or hardening your muscles) during a massage is counterproductive. If you are able to, relax those muscles. Let your massage therapist know this is happening. They may need to adjust the massage technique being used. They may also be able to help you relax the affected area.
12. If you find your thoughts racing during the massage, one way to be more body-centered and to quiet the mind is to follow the hands of the massage therapist and focus on how the touch feels.
13. If anything is happening during the massage that you dislike or seems improper, you have the right to ask the massage therapist to stop. If necessary, you also have the right to end the session.
14. If you are dizzy or lightheaded after the massage, do not get off the table too fast.
15. Drink extra water after a massage.
16. Allow for some open, quiet time after your massage session if possible. Sometimes one needs a little time to integrate or absorb the results of the massage session or needs some "re-entry" time.
17. Massage has its greatest benefits over time. The therapeutic effects of massage are cumulative, so the more often a person gets a massage, the better he or she will feel and the more quickly one's body will respond. From one session to the next, relaxation deepens as the chronic patterns of stress in the body are affected and released. If you are getting massage to address chronic muscular tension or recovery from a soft tissue injury, more than one session is usually needed, so be prepared to schedule several sessions.