

A Guide to Massage Therapy

Massage therapy relieves stress and tension for many people. Executives, laborers, children, the elderly, or the disabled can all benefit from massage therapy.

What is massage therapy?

Massage therapy is a manual therapeutic procedure that uses touch to treat the muscular structures of the body. There are many different types of massage therapy techniques. Some use deep kneading motions, and others use light pressure or long strokes. Massage therapy is used to relieve stress, increase blood flow, soothe aches and pain, relax tense muscles, and increase the general well-being of the body. The use of massage therapy is spreading to many segments of the population. Athletes are using it to increase performance and decrease their aches, pains and stiffness after physical exertion. Employers are also discovering the benefits of providing on-site massage therapy for their employees. Some hospitals are now incorporating massage therapy into their treatments, and a growing number of health care and insurance companies are now covering massage therapy services.

What are the benefits of massage therapy?

Massage therapy may improve range of motion; stretch tensed muscles; loosen ligaments; relieve muscle spasm and associated pain; and speed recovery of fatigued muscles. Massage therapy may not be appropriate, however, if you have certain medical conditions such as phlebitis, an infectious disease, cardiac problems, certain skin conditions, inflamed or infected tissue, open wounds, or some forms of cancer. You may want to consult your physician if you have any of these conditions, before seeking the services of a massage therapist.

What kind of training does a massage therapist undergo?

Many states require massage therapists to be licensed in order to practice; other states do not. Most states, cities and counties require completion of a massage therapy training program. In addition to class hours, years of practice are equally important in this hands-on profession. Even with advanced training, massage therapists are not licensed to diagnose any medical conditions or prescribe medications. As part of its credentialing process, ASH Networks verifies the education, malpractice history, and other records of every massage therapist in its network.

Are there different types of massage therapy techniques?

The various massage techniques that comprise massage therapy are generally described as physical actions performed on the body, such as touch, compression, stroking, joint movement, friction, kneading, vibration, and

percussion. There are more than 150 variations of techniques, and massage therapists may utilize multiple techniques. Some of the most common types of massage techniques are:

- **Swedish Massage** – This is probably the most common type of massage. It uses long strokes, kneading and friction applied to the superficial muscle layers to promote relaxation and circulation. This technique is often used for a full-body massage.
- **Deep Muscle/Deep Tissue Massage** – Uses deep pressure and slow strokes to release chronic areas of tension and contraction. This technique is usually applied to specific areas of tension in the body, but may also be used for a full-body massage. Since it uses deeper pressure than Swedish massage, be ready for a little more intense treatment for your tension-filled aches and pains.
- **Trigger Point Therapy** – This technique uses deep pressure at tender areas called trigger points. Trigger points are often like a “knot” in your muscle. trigger point therapy is often used in cases of chronic soft tissue pain.
- **Shiatsu/Acupressure** – Uses pressure at specific points along acupuncture meridians in order to enhance the energy flow through the body. Once energy balance has been re-established, pain relief often follows.
- **Reflexology** – The guiding concept for reflexology is that certain organs, nerves, and glands in your body are connected with “reflex areas” on the bottoms of your feet, hands, and other areas of the body. By massaging corresponding areas, reflexologists work to relieve a variety of conditions in the body.
- **Sports Massage** – Uses massage to prepare an athlete’s body for competition or to help the body recover after athletic activity. “Maintenance” massage is a regular series of sessions designed to optimize athletic performance. “Event” massage takes place before, during, and after athletic events. Massage helps the athlete warm up and reduce tension before and during competition. Then, massage after the sporting event helps improve the rate of recovery time for the athlete.

How should I prepare for a massage treatment?

Ask your massage therapist about the technique(s) he or she uses. Certain types of massage therapy are uncomfortable during application due to the strength of pressure and application to sensitive acupoints, trigger points, muscle spasms, or adhesions from old injuries or chronic physical stress. You should also ask if you will wear loose clothing during the massage or simply a drape.

How many treatments will I need?

Depending on the duration, severity and nature of your complaint, as well as your physical activity, the number and frequency of treatments may vary. Your massage therapist may recommend only one massage or a series of massages over a few weeks. A typical massage will last about 30-60 minutes.

What about other treatments I may be receiving?

Be sure to tell your massage therapist about any injuries or surgeries that you may have had or any medications that you are using. You should also discuss other treatments you may be receiving, including chiropractic, acupuncture, or physical therapy. The information provided in this article is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or health care. Always seek the advice of your physician before beginning any new treatment or fitness program or if you have questions regarding a medical condition.

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