



Massage Therapy

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9/27/10

We human beings are a tactile species, that is, most of us like to touch and be touched.¹ There are many types of touch that are familiar. For example, holding or shaking a hand or the congratulatory, supportive pat on the back. We are also very familiar with the rubbing that happens when, for example, we stub a toe or bump our head.

Simply put, massage therapy is an “assortment of techniques involving manipulation of the soft tissues of the body through pressure and movement.”²

Research indicates that massage therapy can help reduce stress and tension, bolster the immune system and improve mood. It can also help to reduce chronic muscle tension and postural imbalances. Certain types of massage therapy can help with such things as pain, sleep, anxiety, depression, physical discomfort, stress reduction and mood.

According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) there are over 80 different massage techniques. It is wise to do some research to find the style and technique most suited to your goals, needs and medical conditions. The NCCAM resource below can help you to learn more about these and other complementary modalities.

Choosing a Massage Therapist

- Ask about licensure: they should be licensed in the state you are in—this ensures that they are adequately trained. Various states have different recommendations for the amount and type of training required. For example, massage therapists in New York State are required to have over 1000 hours of training that includes anatomy, physiology, pathology, massage and clinical practice.
- The massage therapy technique should suit you. For example, if you are active and fit a deep tissue massage might be appropriate, but if you have specific needs, for example, recovery from a broken bone or disease, a medical massage which requires advanced training might be more appropriate. Swedish massage is the most common form of massage therapy.
- Ideally, you and your massage therapist will work as a team to help you to relax your body, reduce stress and improve health.
- You should always feel comfortable with your therapist. If you don't—the therapist or the technique might not be right for you—if this is the case, try another therapist and another technique.
- Recommendations from friends and health professionals can be helpful in finding a suitable massage therapist.
- Some insurance companies will pay for medical massage and manual lymph drainage with a prescription from a doctor—patients should check with their individual providers to see if they are eligible for massage benefit.

¹ Montagu, Ashley. *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*. 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

² <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/backgrounds/manipulative.htm#def>

Resources

Office of the professions, New York State Education Department: On this website you can verify if a massage therapist is licensed to practice massage therapy in your state:

<http://www.op.nysed.gov/opsearches.htm#nme>

Touch Research Institute: you can find research about massage therapy.

<http://www6.miami.edu/touch-research/>

National Institute of Health/National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine: this site is a reliable and comprehensive resource for learning about various massage and meditation techniques. <http://nccam.nih.gov/>

Dr Emmett Miller: here you can listen to and purchase various types of meditation instruction.

<http://www.drmler.com/>

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