

What is Massage Therapy?

Massage therapy, associated with Swedish massage, is the most common form of massage treatment in the United States. Massage therapists use long, smooth strokes, kneading and other movements focused on superficial layers of muscle using massage oil or lotion.

How Does Massage Therapy Work?

Massage therapy improves circulation by bringing oxygen and other nutrients to body tissues. It relieves muscle tension and pain, increases flexibility and mobility, and helps clear lactic acid and other waste, which reduces pain and stiffness in muscles and joints.

Why Do People Get Massage Therapy?

People get massage therapy for relaxation or for a variety of health conditions:

- Back pain
- Inflammatory conditions such as arthritis and tendinitis
- Stress relief and stress-related conditions
- Headaches and migraines
- Muscle and related conditions such as spasms, strains and sprains
- Repetitive strain injury, such as carpal tunnel syndrome
- Circulatory and respiratory problems
- Post-injury and post surgical rehabilitation

Massage therapy relieves stress. It helps the body's stress response by lowering levels of hormones such as cortisol. Massage therapy also appears to enhance immune function.

What a Typical Massage Therapy Session is Like

A typical massage therapy session is between 40 and 90 minutes. Your massage will begin with a brief consultation and review of symptoms, medical history, and lifestyle.

You will be asked to undress (many people keep their underwear on) while the massage therapist is out of the room, and lie face down under a sheet on a padded massage table.

The massage therapist will knock on the door to make sure you are ready. The massage therapist re-enters the room and will then adjust the face rest and pillows to ensure that you are comfortable and properly positioned. Tell the massage therapist if you are too warm or cold.

The massage therapist uses a light oil or lotion on the skin and begins the massage. A full body massage usually begins on the back and then moves down to the legs. You will then be asked to turn over so you are face up. The massage continues on your arms, legs, neck, and abdomen.

You are underneath the sheet at all times, and in North America, only the part of the body being treated at any one time is uncovered.

After the massage, the massage therapist leaves the room so you can get changed.

Take your time getting up. If you sit or stand too quickly, you may feel lightheaded or dizzy.

Will Massage Therapy Hurt?

Massage therapy should not hurt. Occasionally there is mild aching when the massage therapist applies pressure over "knots" and other areas of muscle tension. If the pressure is too strong for you, let the massage therapist know.

How Will I Feel After a Massage?

Most people feel calm and relaxed after a treatment. Occasionally, people experience mild temporary aching for a day.

Precautions

Massage therapy is not recommended for certain people:

- People with infectious skin disease, rash, or open wounds
- Immediately after surgery
- Immediately after chemotherapy or radiation, unless recommended by your doctor.
- People prone to blood clots. There is a risk of blood clots being dislodged. If you have heart disease, check with your doctor before having a massage.
- Pregnant women should check with their doctor first if they are considering getting a massage. Massage in pregnant women should be done by massage therapists who are certified in pregnancy massage.

Massage should not be done directly over bruises, inflamed skin, unhealed wounds, tumors, abdominal hernia, or areas of recent fractures.

Additional Massage Tips

- don't eat a heavy meal before the massage.
- If it's your first time at the clinic or spa, arrive at least 10 minutes early to complete the necessary forms. Otherwise, arrive 5 minutes early so you can have a few minutes to rest and relax before starting the massage.