

Ask the Experts...

What You Should Know About Massage?

Is massage advisable for seniors?

According to Ashley Montagu, a noted anthropologist and acknowledged expert in the field of touch, "...it might be conjectured that the course and outcome of many an illness in the aged has been greatly influenced by the quality of tactile [touch] support the individual has received before and during the illness. [...] especially in the aged, there is an inherent hunger for touch and the absence of touch from others may inhibit the patient from seeking it. For those suffering the isolation of dementia, reaching through to that need becomes even more essential."

Also, according to one unknown author, "The aging desire neither to be patronized nor tolerated, but to be understood, respected and worthy of the love they have bestowed on others. Because we are unwilling to face the fact of aging, we behave as if it isn't there. It is this massive evasion that is the principle reason for our failure to understand the needs of the aging. The most important and neglected of these needs is the need for tactile stimulation, the elderly often have impaired hearing, visual acuity, mobility, and vitality – problems that can make them feel helpless and vulnerable. It is through the emotional involvement of touch that one can reach through the isolation and communicate love, trust, affection, and warmth. [...] The use of touch and physical closeness may be the most important way to communicate to the aged person that they are important as human beings. It is especially in the aging that we see touching at its best as an act of spiritual grace and a continuing human sacrament."

What are the basic benefits of massage?

The following benefits are commonly experienced by those who receive a massage:

- Calms and balances the nervous system
- Improves blood circulation and lymph flow
- Reduces muscle and joint pain
- Relaxes the mind
- Relieves stress

Are there other benefits related to massage?

Yes, there are numerous general and specific benefits related to massage. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the amount of research and scientific evidence related to massage therapy outcomes. Body scans, blood analysis, EM (Electro-Magnetic) and other increasingly sensitive and accurate sensory equipment, blood pressure and heart rate values, and several other subjective and objective measurement methods have been used to both verify previously expected massage outcomes and identify new effects that support the benefit of massage therapy. The following list identifies various body systems and the number of positive effects that massage is able to generate (as reported in a recent medical text):

- Cardiovascular system – 16
- Lymphatic/immune system – 6
- Skin system – 6
- Nervous and endocrine system – 19
- Muscle system – 14
- Connective tissues – 8
- Respiratory system – 7 (5 of which are the key pulmonary variables)
- Digestive system – 4
- Urinary system – 2
- Miscellaneous effects of massage – 14

Is massage effective in treating specific conditions?

First, it is helpful to be clear as to what is meant by “effective in treating”. Don’t confuse the term “treating” with “curing”. To cure means to eliminate, whereas to treat means to reduce. Many understand that the body is its own natural healer, as is clearly observable upon experiencing a cut, scrape, broken bone, headache, flu, etc. In support of the body’s healing activities, a critical role is played by medicine and medical processes which are often understood as influences which enable the body to operate at peak efficiency. Even though there may be times when symptom reduction is so pronounced that it seems like there has been a cure, it is still best to think of treatment as resulting in symptom reduction as that is the most likely achievable goal.

So, as to specific conditions that massage is effective in treating; the following partial list of researched and documented conditions should give you an idea of the broad range of conditions that can be improved by massage therapy treatments.

- Alzheimer’s Disease, Asthma, ADHD

- Cancer, Cerebral Palsy
- Diabetes
- Fibromyalgia
- Headaches, Hospitalized and Hospice patients
- Low back pain, Lung disease, Lymph edema
- MS
- TMJD

By adding to this the vast list of conditions that have been subjectively and intuitively known to be improved by massage one can understand that an easier question to answer would be “What conditions is massage NOT effective in treating?” as that list is much smaller and involves the term “contraindication” which means risky or inadvisable to treat.

When should massage NOT be used, or when is it contraindicated?

Because “massage” is a general term that covers over 200 different types of approaches, everything from non-contact energy work, to rather aggressive deep-tissue work, it is important to identify the type of massage that is being considered. Aggressive deep-tissue work is contraindicated (not advised) for a frail elderly person with osteoporosis, but gentle relaxation massage, reflexology, reiki and other less aggressive types of massage may be quite appropriate and beneficial. Often, when a medical professional advises against a massage, they are doing so with a general, all-inclusive mind-set in an effort to protect their patient from the possibility of experiencing a massage that is too aggressive for their specific condition. Always keep in mind that there IS a hierarchy, the recommendations of your primary care provider ALWAYS take precedence over the recommendations of a massage therapist.

Fortunately, the individual receiving the massage does not have to bother themselves with this situation. If a person wants a massage, all they have to do is contact a massage therapist, and explain their medical situation, concerns and expectations, (a standard part of the intake process prior to receiving your first massage). This information prompts the massage therapist to ask important questions and if necessary, request authorization to contact your doctor for “permission to treat”. This does not require a fee or a doctor’s visit as it is typically just a matter of a phone call from the therapist explaining the type of massage that is planned and the doctor’s giving a verbal ok to do so. This process may produce a delay of treatment or the physician’s denial to permit treatment, but it is a necessary process to ensure your safety.

Contraindications can be local (a limited area of the body, such as an infection or injection site) or absolute (not at all, such as immediately following surgery), and fall into two categories; don't treat and treat with caution. The following are a few examples of each:

“Don't treat” contraindications:

- Acute (new or brief) injury or illness – delay treatment for 48 to 72 hours to give the body time to adjust (stabilize) and treat (heal) itself before stepping in to support the process.
- Infectious illness, disease or condition – don't aggravate the symptoms for the individual or pass the problem on to the therapist or others.

“Treat with caution” contraindications:

- Pregnancy – avoid extensive contact with select areas; consider body position; only gentle therapy during first trimester.
- Medications – blood thinners (light pressure only), Parkinson's (treat just after medications), Diabetes (wait two hours after medications before treatment)
- Cancer – only light pressure in the problem quadrant, avoid treatment sites and chemical contact.
- Joint replacements – avoid standard Range of Motion (ROM) exercises.
- Various conditions – warrant light treatments only, postural considerations, controlled duration of treatment and adjustments to types of strokes applied.

Most therapists have ready access to pathology manuals that clearly define concerns and recommended approaches to best address the needs of their clients. Massage therapists are licensed health care providers that operate in compliance with the same ethical, confidentiality, and HIPAA standards that govern the behavior of other health care and counseling professionals. It is very important to openly share your true medical conditions and related concerns with your therapist.

What is CAM?

CAM stands for Complimentary Alternative Medicine. This is the standard term that covers a wide range of non-traditional western medicine. CAM is a compromise term intended to satisfy many unstated concerns of practitioners in several fields. In an effort to get the most mileage out of this catch-all term let's consider each of the three words that make it work.

Complimentary is a wonderful, true and critical word. Massage therapy IS a complimentary therapy. It is not intended to stand alone and meet a

person's needs all by itself. Massage therapy compliments (adds to and makes better or improves) the efforts of other medical practitioners; doctors, surgeons, dieticians, dentists, psychologists/psychiatrists, pharmacologists, chiropractors, podiatrists, oncologists, on and on. A quick review of the basic benefits of massage reveals why massage is so supportive of the healing efforts initiated by such a broad range of medical professionals.

Alternative is the weakest and most problematical word in the term "Complimentary Alternative Medicine". Some think that it should have been left out entirely and in some older texts it is not there. Some feel that the word alternative implies choice and is too close in meaning to "optional" and that the use of either of these words degrades the concept of "complimentary". Choice naturally promotes an exclusionary either-or decision rather than a team joint-effort mentality. By asking what it is an alternative to, the problem becomes clearer (slightly). Alternative is intended to identify all CAMs as being alternatives to traditional western medicine, as in not being a part or component of traditional medicine. It is a bit difficult to recognize and value their complementary function when they are placed into a location outside of the box. Fortunately words are only words and in the real world an ever increasing number of practitioners in traditional western medicine are recognizing and utilizing CAMs to support their healing efforts. Another way to look at alternative is to apply it to the various practices covered by CAM (acupuncture, acupressure, homeopathy, chiropractic, massage, hypnosis, iridology, Rolfing, etc.). That way there is no issue at all as you are merely choosing among the different types of complimentary medicines. Medicine can be defined as non-surgical treatment of bodily disorders, a perfect word for what we are after. So, as a CAM, massage is recognized as a supportive non-surgical treatment of bodily disorders.

Is it correct to think of massage as a powerful ally?

There's no denying the power of bodywork (massage). Regardless of the adjectives we assign to it (pampering, rejuvenating, therapeutic, palliative) or the reasons we seek it out (a luxurious treat, stress relief, pain management), massage therapy can be a powerful ally in your healthcare regimen. The incredible benefits of massage are doubly powerful if taken in regular "doses." Professionals at the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami explain that the more massage you get, the greater benefits you reap. Here's why: Experts estimate that upwards of ninety percent of disease is stress related. And perhaps nothing ages us faster, internally and externally, than high stress. While eliminating anxiety and

pressure altogether is not feasible, massage can, without a doubt, help manage stress. This translates into:

- Decreased anxiety
- Enhanced sleep quality
- Greater energy
- Improved concentration
- Increased circulation
- Reduced fatigue
- Improved self-image

Furthermore, clients often report a sense of perspective and clarity after receiving a massage. The emotional balance bodywork provides can often be just as vital and valuable as the more tangible physical benefits.

What is Geriatric Massage?

Geriatric massage encompasses basic relaxation and stress relief and is also a beneficial tool in fighting many of the symptoms of aging. Today, massage in all its forms is at the forefront of therapies utilized by millions of people.

“Geriatric massage is NOT a generic term for massaging the elderly (to make them feel a little better). The FOCUS is on helping a weakened body to maintain or sometimes even regain those functions that are essential for general well-being at any age.” – Dietrich Miesler / Daybreak Geriatric Massage Institute

Geriatric massage therapists are sensitive to health issues commonly experienced by elderly clients, and are trained to determine when standard massage practices are appropriate and when modified techniques would be more effective, such as the special routines which have been developed to maximize treatment for bed- and wheelchair-bound clients. They are aware of certain medication restrictions and are competent in servicing clients with commonly encountered ailments such as ALS, Alzheimer’s, diabetes, Parkinson’s, implants, and joint replacements.

Geriatric massage therapists typically offer a full range of standard massage services for clients of all ages as well as specialized services for the elderly. Geriatric clients receive standard or modified massage treatments as appropriate and have the option of requesting a “Geriatric massage” which is a modified full-body massage of shorter duration (30 minutes instead of 60 minutes). The shorter duration geriatric massage is less taxing on the client and is more affordable. Many clients prefer two

shorter sessions within a given time frame rather than a single longer session during the same period.

What should I be prepared for during the massage?

There are certain things you should expect during a massage. Most massage and bodywork techniques are traditionally performed with the client unclothed; however, you may decide what amount of clothing you prefer to wear for your own comfort. The therapist will leave the room while you undress, relax on the table, and cover yourself with a clean sheet. Throughout the session, you will be properly draped or covered. Only the area being worked on will be exposed. A light oil or lotion may be used to permit your muscles to be worked on without causing excessive friction to the skin. The average full-body session lasts approximately one hour, but some clients enjoy shorter, thirty minute sessions.

What should I do during the massage session?

Make yourself comfortable. The therapist will either gently move you or tell you what is needed throughout the session (such as lifting your arm). Many people just close their eyes and completely relax. Others like to talk during their session. Feel free to ask the therapist questions about massage in general or about the particular technique you are receiving.

Trust and respect are critical components of a quality massage session. Trusting the therapist's intent to provide you with a positive and healthful treatment while knowing that the therapist is respecting your needs and wishes expressed before and during the treatment are the keys to a successful session. Remember, you are always in charge of the session and your wishes to decrease pressure or stop the session will always be respected.

What should I expect or do after receiving a massage?

Water is very important after a massage. The standard recommendation that a person should drink 8 to 10 glasses of water per day is ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT for the 48 hours following a massage because toxins and other waste byproducts typically released during the massage process will either be flushed from the body (by drinking the recommended amount of water) or they will be redistributed within the body.

Immediately after the massage you should feel pretty good, however, discomfort and soreness are typical after a deep tissue massage, especially the morning after (much like the first time you start a new exercise routine). If you do experience soreness, it should disappear by

the third day. Always contact your therapist if you have any concerns. Drinking water is the single most effective means of reducing after massage discomfort.

Sleep is often improved, as is concentration, ease of mobility, and one's sense of general well being.

Medication adjustments are not an immediate result, but over time reduced stress and improved circulation may result in a DR. CONTROLLED medication modification.

How often should I get a massage?

Every individual deals with different variables. If a particular health issue is being addressed, the severity and longevity of the problem will affect how frequently the initial corrective treatments are required. Once specific issues have been resolved, a maintenance/wellness routine might consist of once every month or every other month sessions. Your body will tell you when you need a massage (unless you tune it out). Once you determine your personal needs it's up to you to decide whether to stay ahead of the need or to wait longer and respond to the need when it returns. Keep in mind that a full-body massage is not your only option. A 15 minute seated massage may be all you need one month while a one hour full-body massage may be what you need the next month.

Must massage be performed by a Licensed Massage Therapist?

The state of Florida recognizes that massage affects bodily functions to such an extent that it has tasked the Department of Health (DOH) with regulating and licensing massage practitioners and establishments. A Licensed Massage Therapist (LMT) must satisfy DOH mandated background and training requirements including ongoing continuing education credits intended to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. Within the state of Florida, a person that performs massage for compensation (money or goods) is required by law to have a valid FL massage license.

Even though massage is one of the safest health care practices, due to the health and possible safety issues involved, it is strongly advised that a Licensed Massage Therapist be consulted to discuss appropriate procedures and concerns before providing regular massage to a friend or family member, especially a frail or ill one.

Once a massage therapist has determined the most effective routines for a specific client, they are often more than happy to train a friend or family member so that they can provide more frequent treatments on a continuing basis.

In Summary:

Massage can improve the Quality of Life experienced by both the giver and the receiver by impacting their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Massage promotes comfort, helps to control symptoms of specific diseases and reduces general symptoms such as pain and anxiety. Massage is a practical and appropriate way to help someone feel secure, comforted, and cared for.

Do you have additional questions?

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Check our website for additional information:

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