

What You Should Know About Massage Therapy

Massage therapy is one of the fastest growing fields in health care today. This technique may improve a person's health and well-being through the manipulation of muscles and tissues in the body.

What are the potential benefits of massage therapy?

Physiological

- Improves circulation
- Relieves muscle tension
- Stimulates the immune system
- Relieves chronic pain
- Improves range of motion

Mental

- Improves focus and concentration
- Calms the mind
- Creates a relaxed state of alertness

Emotional

- Satisfies the need for caring touch
- Enhances self image
- Reduces anxiety levels

How many massage techniques are there?

Many techniques have been developed around the world. The benefit of many techniques is that therapists can better address the many conditions of their patients. Here are some common techniques used:

- **Swedish massage** – uses a system of long gliding strokes, kneading and friction (rubbing) techniques on the top layers of muscle to promote relaxation.
- **Shiatsu massage** – uses applied pressure of the thumbs and gentle stretches. Oriental medical tradition claims that it will stimulate the body's vital energy flow.
- **Reflexology** – uses firm pressure on specific points in the hands and feet. In some healing traditions, reflexology is believed to affect other organs in the body, but this has not been proven.
- **On-site or chair massage** – is a 10 to 15 minute seated massage. The client remains fully clothed while the therapist focuses on the back, arms, hands, neck and head. On-site massage is offered in a variety of places, such as office buildings, airports, shopping malls and health fairs.
- **Lymphatic massage** – uses light-pressured movements directed toward the heart and lymphatic ducts to direct the lymphatic flow throughout the body. It is sometimes used for edema (swelling).
- **Neuromuscular therapy** – applies finger pressure to “trigger points” (painful, irritated areas in muscle) in order to break the cycle of spasm or pain.

Massage for special populations

- **Sports massage** – is a vigorous massage of the muscles being used in athletic activity.
- **Prenatal massage** – is carefully done for women in all stages of pregnancy. Movements are focused on the back, buttocks and legs to help relieve stress and aches associated with pregnancy.
- **Infant and child massage** – is a calming touch usually given by a parent. It uses gliding strokes, first away from and then toward the heart to potentially enhance the health and well-being of the infant/child and improve the bond between child and parent.
- **Geriatric massage** – applies a sequence of strokes and compressions on an older adult to offer comfort and help ease the discomforts that often come with age.

- **Clinical massage for patients with cancer** – involves touch therapy techniques that are gentle and soothing. Massage therapists with advanced training in cancer care work to reduce pain and help individuals to relax and feel better. (Talk to your doctor or oncologist about massage therapy before your first therapy session. Your doctor and massage therapist can work together to create the best plan of care for you.)

Where should I begin when looking for a massage therapist?

1. Decide what you expect to get out of your massage.
2. Determine what technique would best fit your needs.
3. Get personal references. Ask your family, friends and those in the community for recommendations.
4. Ask for referrals from physicians, chiropractors, physical therapists or other health professionals.
5. Contact Aurora Health Care's Integrative Medicine department at 414-219-5900.
6. Contact the American Massage Therapy Association to get a list of the certified therapists in your area at 877-905-2700 or amtamassage.org.

What is the next step?

Before making your final choice about a massage therapist, consider the following questions:

1. Was the therapist properly trained at an accredited institution?
2. Does the therapist have a valid license or certification to practice massage in your state?
3. How many years of practice does the therapist have?
4. Is he or she professionally affiliated in a national organization?
5. Is the therapist's place of practice clean, safe and comfortable?

What is the difference between a *licensed* and a *certified* massage therapist?

Licensing – is a legal agreement between the individual and the government for the purpose of establishing a business. Licensing does not necessarily indicate effectiveness or proficiency, but it is a governmental regulation primarily covering the physical office environment, sanitation and training requirements.

Certified – means that an individual has completed a course of training from a school of bodywork, which generally means 100 to 1,000 hours of training. Some practitioners have taken a national certification exam. Others are affiliated with a national organization, which may or may not require a level of proficiency for admittance.

What about cost?

The average rates for massage are as follows:
30 minutes – \$30 to \$45
one hour – \$55 to \$85

These price ranges may vary depending on your location. The type of massage you receive also may alter the price, depending on the practitioner.

For more information

Please contact Aurora Health Care's Integrative Medicine department at 414-219-5900 or the American Massage Therapy Association at:

500 Davis Street, Suite 900
Evanston, IL 60201
847-864-0123
877-905-2700 (toll free)