

MASSAGE THERAPY

FAST FACTS

- Research has found that massage therapy alleviates pain and discomfort, while providing mental relaxation.
- A survey conducted by the American Massage Therapy Association found that in a 12-month span, 19% of adults received at least one massage.
- 83% of people surveyed in June 2022 said the main reason for receiving their last massage in the 12 months was health or wellness (42%) or stress related (41%). Health or wellness reasons included pain relief, soreness, stiffness or spasms, injury recovery, migraines, prevention, pregnancy or prenatal care, and general well-being.

WHAT IS MASSAGE THERAPY?

Massage therapy is a healing practice that is thousands of years old. It is the manual administration of pressure to the body's soft tissue including muscles, tendons, ligaments, and connective tissue. Massage therapy is usually done to loosen and relax tissue, but can also help with serious physical or mental health issues, like chronic pain, anxiety, or side effects of cancer treatment.

HOW DOES MASSAGE THERAPY WORK?

Massage therapy works on your body's relaxation and mechanical responses.

- **Relaxation Response**—During a massage, changes in your automatic nervous system occur. Your breathing and heart rate slow, your muscles begin to relax, and your blood pressure goes down. Serotonin is released, increasing positive mood and thoughts.
- **Mechanical Response**—Massage increases circulation (lymph and blood) and relaxes tissue. This can decrease swelling and inflammation in soft tissue. As muscle tissues relax, muscle contractions and spasms are decreased. The increased circulation and relaxation of muscle tissue decrease pain.

What is the evidence?

Massage has been shown to be effective for the following:

- Fibromyalgia pain, anxiety and depression¹
- HIV anxiety and hyperventilation²
- Breast cancer symptoms, including negative emotions and fatigue.³
- Cancer pain levels, anxiety and fatigue⁴

To learn more about massage therapy's effect on specific health concerns, the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) provides an in-depth look at the effectiveness of massage therapy: nccih.nih.gov/health/massage.

What can I expect at my first massage therapy session?

The clinic staff or massage therapist will talk with you before your first massage. You will answer some questions about why you are there, your medical history, any health conditions, and all medications you take. Tell your therapist about any injuries or allergies. The therapist will then talk with you about your massage and how he or she will address your symptoms and concerns.

What conditions does massage therapy treat?

Massage therapy is used to treat both physical and mental health conditions and address symptoms related to chronic health concerns, including:

- Chronic and acute pain
- Cancer symptoms and side effects
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fibromyalgia

- Headaches
- HIV/AIDS
- Premature infant care

Are there precautions, side effects or safety concerns I should know about before I start massage therapy?

Massage therapy is widely considered safe when performed by a trained and qualified provider. Nevertheless, there is potential risk involved, as there is with all conventional and integrative medicine practices.

Precautions

Before getting massage, talk to your doctor and massage therapist if you have:

- Bruises
- Open wounds
- Areas of weak skin
- A blood clot in a vein
- A bleeding disorder, or take blood thinners
- Low blood platelet counts

Massage is not safe for every pregnant woman. Talk to your healthcare provider before getting massage if you are pregnant.

Oncology massage is a specialized form of massage therapy.⁵ Providers are trained in understanding the needs of people with cancer and in using massage to help relieve symptoms and side effects. For example, lymphatic drainage massage can help with lymphedema, a condition that can develop after breast cancer surgery.

If you have cancer, ask your doctor or oncology team about oncology massage. You can also see a non-specialist massage therapist, but talk with him or her about the cancer and treatment first. A massage therapist should not massage any area that has recently been treated with radiation or the site of any tumors.

Possible Side Effects of Massage

- Bruising
- Discomfort or soreness
- Allergic reaction to massage oils or creams

Massage therapy does not take the place of your regular medical treatment, but it can boost whole person health. Over time, it may help you need less medication or fewer other treatments. Please talk with your doctor before making any changes to your treatment plan. to making changes to your treatment plan.

What training and certifications does a massage therapist need?

Massage therapists are regulated by 49 states and the District of Columbia (California has a voluntary certification process and cities and counties may require certification to practice). Other areas may also regulate massage therapists at the county or city level. To find the requirements for your state, county, or city, please visit the [American Massage Therapy Association](http://www.amtamassage.org) (AMTA).

How can I find a massage therapist?

Check www.amtamassage.org to search by your location. You can also use keywords to search by technique or expertise, such as “oncology.”

Another way to find a massage therapist is to ask your health care provider if they recommend someone. If you find a therapist through talking to friends and family, check to make sure they are trained and licensed, and that they have experience treating your health condition.

How much does massage therapy cost?

The cost of massage therapy treatments varies depending on where you live, what the therapist charges, and what services you need (for example, a 90-minute session costs more than a 60-minute one).

Some insurance plans also pay for massage therapy, so check your benefits online or call your insurance company to learn if this is true for you. Sometimes, hospitals and health centers offer massage therapy paid for by health insurance. Some insurance companies offer discounts if you see a provider they recommend (“in network”).

Different types of massage therapy?

Chair Massage—Upper body massage, performed using a special chair while the client is fully clothed and sitting up. Addresses the upper body.

Deep Tissue Massage—Slower movements while applying more force on the body’s soft tissues to help muscles heal from injury.

Oncology Massage—Massage from a therapist with specific training in caring for people with cancer and cancer survivors. May do lymph drainage and other forms of massage related to cancer care.

Reflexology—Massage of specific points on the feet that are said to affect other areas of the body. Client may be fully dressed.

Sports Massage—Designed to treat injuries and soothe the bodies of athletes and others who are very physically active.

Swedish Massage—Gentle massage that involves long strokes, kneading, deep circular movements, vibrating and tapping.

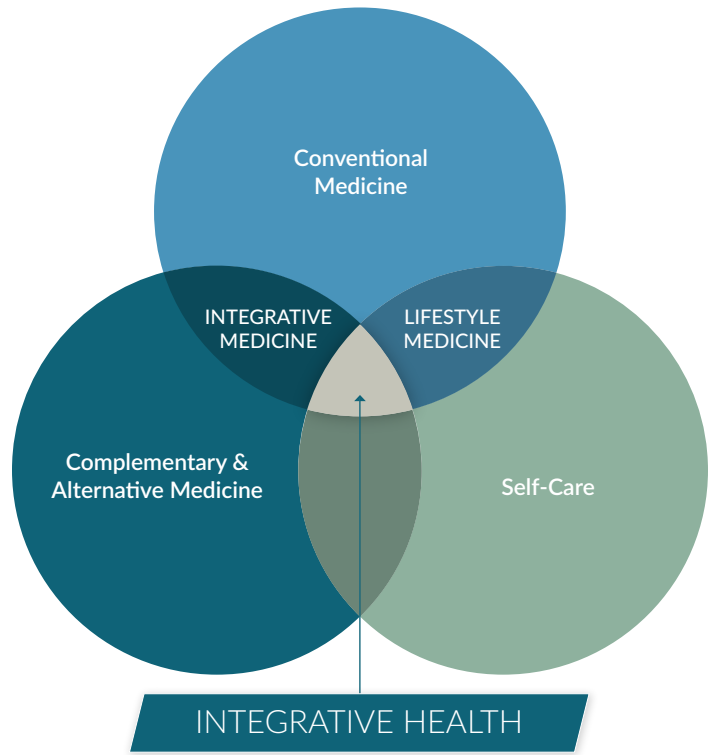
Trigger Point Massage—Breaks down tight muscle fibers that typically form from overuse or injury on muscles that are overused or have been injured.

Visit the American Massage Therapy Association at www.amta.org to learn more about different types of massage.

What is whole person health?

Whole person health looks after the wellbeing of the mind and spirit as well as the physical body, with support from a health care team dedicated to all proven approaches – conventional, complementary and self-care.

My notes and questions



Sources:

- 1 Li, Y.H., et al. (2014), Massage Therapy for Fibromyalgia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. PLOS ONE 9(2): e89304.
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- 3 Pan, Y.Q., et al. (2014). Massage interventions and treatment-related side effects of breast cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis. International Journal of Clinical Oncology 19.5: pp. 829-841.
- 4 Boyd, C., et al. (2016). The Evidence for Massage Therapy (EMT) Working Group; The Impact of Massage Therapy on Function in Pain Populations—A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials: Part II, Cancer Pain Populations. Pain Medicine 17 (8): pp. 1553-1568.
- 5 Penny J, Sturgeon S. Oncology massage: An integrative approach to cancer care. Massage Magazine. June 20, 2022. Available at <https://www.massagemag.com/oncology-massage-an-integrative-approach-to-cancer-care-135055/>. Accessed September 5, 2024.