

# TOUCH THERAPY: MASSAGE FOR YOU



The use of massage as a therapy can trace its roots to ancient civilisations dating back to 3,000BC. Massage was thought to heal injuries, relieve pain, and prevent and cure illnesses through a process re-establishing harmony between themselves, their activities and their natural environment. The practise of massage was considered to be a sacred art performed by trained practitioners with learnings passed down through generations. Massage was a vital part of health treatment performed across all members of the community.

Within eastern cultures the benefits of touch therapy and massage maintained its beneficial regard; however cultural shifts in western society labelled it in recent as a luxury and decadent indulgence without any medicinal or community value. In modern times, resurgence has occurred across the world with massage now held with high respect acknowl-

edging potential benefits to health and wellbeing as a tool for healing, stress relief, relaxation and therapeutic practice particularly for musculoskeletal problems.

The Collins dictionary defines massage as "the act of kneading, rubbing etc. parts of the body to promote circulation, suppleness or relaxation". In general terms, it involves pressing, rubbing and manipulating skin, muscles, ligaments and tendons with various levels of pressure.

Any of us that have been on the receipt of a massage can attest to the fact that the level of pressure and technique employed differs between practitioners and massage types. Some massage is of a light pressure using long soothing strokes and others involving more pinpointed pressure with varying degrees of discomfort to release tension, muscle fibre tightness to promoting healing.

## COMMON TYPES OF MASSAGE

*Knowing the types and the technique can help reduce any misconceptions and disappointments and ensure that your selected touch therapy has a positive rather than a negative consequence and experience.*

- **Swedish massage:** A gentle form of massage that uses long strokes, kneading, deep circular movements, vibration and tapping to help relax and restore body balance, comfort and energy. This type of massage is a nice one to try first as it focuses on the superficial layer of muscles using massaging lotion or oil and can be very gentle and relaxing.
- **Aromatherapy Massage:** A gentle form of Swedish massage with the addition of one or more scented plant oils called essential oils to address specific needs such as relaxation, energy restoration, stress-reduction, etc. Essential oils such as lavender, lemongrass and peppermint are often used. This form of massage is often used to benefit stress-related conditions or conditions with an emotional component.
- **Hot Stone Massage:** Heated, smooth stones are placed on certain points on the body to warm and loosen tight muscles and are reported to balance energy centres in the body. This type of massage can be in addition to other massage techniques or it can be a process alone with the therapist applying gentle pressure with the placement of hot stones. The warmth helps warm the muscle and is thought to promote comfort. Hot stone massage is good for people who have muscle tension but prefer lighter massage.
- **Deep tissue massage.** A more energetic and more intense massage technique using slower, more-forceful strokes with a stronger level of pressure to target the deeper layers of muscle and connective tissue working across the muscle grain. Deep tissue massage is used for chronically tight or painful muscles, repetitive strain, postural problems, or recovery from injury. You can feel sore for one to two days after deep tissue massage. However, this type of massage can be beneficial long-term.
- **Sports massage:** Like Swedish massage it is a gentler form however slightly faster, but it focusses on preventing the body from tightening after strenuous exercise or sporting activity. The massage can involve a lot of assisted stretching to help loosen muscles and increase flexibility. This type of massage helps prevent and treat injuries however the focus is on relaxation and enhancing athletic performance.
- **Trigger point massages:** A pinpoint technique which focuses on tight muscle fibres and areas of tight muscles that can form after injury or overuse.
- **Shiatsu:** A form of Japanese massage that uses localised finger pressure in a rhythmic sequence on acupuncture meridians points. The massage uses firm pressure with points being pressed deeply and held for a few seconds to improve the flow of energy and help the body regain balance. Despite the pressure there is usually no soreness afterward.
- **Thai Massage:** Aligns the energies of the body using gentle pressure on specific points with the use of assisted stretches and compressions via a sequence of postures. This is reported to be an energising form of massage that reduces stress and improves flexibility and range of motion.
- **Reflexology:** This type of massage is often referred to as foot massage, however it involves applying pressure to points on the foot that correspond to body organs and systems to release blockages and tension.
- **Lymphatic drainage massage:** Lymphatic Drainage Massage is a gentle massage designed to encourage the natural drainage of the lymph from the body tissue. This form of massage is particularly useful post-surgery and treatments for cancer to help reduce the impacts of lymphadenopathy and lymphedemas. The touch technique uses gentle pressure and long strokes helping to mobilise fluid toward the lymphatic sites, with varying degrees of pressure in the main lymph nodes sites in the chest, neck, pelvis, axilla (armpit), and inguinal groin region.

## RISKS OF MASSAGE

Massage should be approached with great caution if you experience any bleeding disorders including deep vein thrombosis or taking medications to thin the blood. You should also never have a massage that uses oils and talc if you have any open wounds, burns or rashes.

Caution should be demonstrated if you have had a recent fracture or a fracture is suspected, have been diagnosed with severe osteoporosis or thrombocytopenia, cancer, experience unexplained pain and if pregnant, especially in the 1st trimester. It is important to discuss the type of massage and if it is right for you with your doctor.

After some massage treatments you may experience some soreness in the days following a treatment especially if the therapist is using deep tissue or trigger point massage techniques. However, if the pressure used in the massage is too strong or extremely painful make sure that you tell the therapist straight away. You should not experience bruising unless you are on medications that increase your tendency to bruise.

It is important that any therapeutic treatment is done with an experienced and trained therapist to reduce risks and enhance any benefits. Ask for recommendation and ask the therapist about their training and accreditation. Many Australian states have regulations that have set requirements for massage therapists. To find a qualified therapist in your area: Australian Association of Massage Therapists Tel. 1300 138 872

Massage costs vary dependent on the type, therapist and location. Some Private health insurances have reimbursement of services from accredited therapists however the level of reimbursement differs per insurance organisation.

Beyond the disease symptom benefits previously listed massage for some people is enjoyed as a social bond and promotes feelings of comfort and connection. Touch therapy builds a bond between the recipient and the person that connects through the power of touch. Whether it is through a dedicated massage therapy session or simply by hugging a person in distress or need, the power of touch has a powerful effect on health and general feeling of wellbeing.

As a post note: Our furry friends experience the same health benefits from massage. A pet massage or a simple pat of your cat, dog, rabbit, ferret or any furry family friend can improve their circulation, reduce muscle fatigue, remove toxins and promote healthy skin and a shiny coat as it moves the skin's natural oils through his or her fur.



## BENEFITS OF MASSAGE

This therapy is considered to be a complementary or alternative medicine it has over the past years been accepted within both eastern and western medical treatments as having benefits. Apart from feelings of relaxation and calm, massage has been shown in research trials to have beneficial responses on the transmission and suppression of hormones and chemicals within the body. Specifically, massage releases endorphins, a chemical in the brain that produces euphoric feelings of wellbeing it also has the capacity to reduce hormones, such as adrenalin, cortisol and norepinephrine which are known to effect stress responses. In autoimmune disease stress has been found to be a trigger to symptom exacerbation and high levels of stress hormones have been found to have an influence of our immune system with many cancer researchers suggesting that increased stress could be a causative agent.

The physical benefits of massage are also being increasingly studied and have been reported to include: improved circulation with increased healing of wounds and recovery of tissue injury; and stimulation of the lymphatic system; increased joint mobility and flexibility with reduced muscle tension; reduced levels of inflammation and pain in joints and muscles; increased cognition with heightened mental alertness; and reduced levels of insomnia, stress, anxiety and depression. Massage has been also found to reduce the impact and length of headaches and through promotion of body fluid flows improve digestion.

Despite its many benefits, massage does have some risks and special considerations and you should discuss these with your treating doctor and management team.

### References

1. <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/massage>

2. [www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/massage/art-20045743](http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/massage/art-20045743)

### Further reading

<https://www.painscience.com/articles/self-massage.php>

<http://inspiyr.com/try-these-self-massage-techniques/>

<http://juicing-for-health.com/7-quick-simple-self-massage-techniques-to-relieve-various-body-aches>

<http://www.prevention.com/health/health-concerns/self-massage-5-ways-give-yourself-massage>