



# MASSAGE THERAPY FOR CHRONIC PAIN & ILLNESS

— Continuing Education E-Book —



ONLINE MASSAGE  
— CE CLASSES —

Melissa Wood, ND, MTI, LMT

# MASSAGE THERAPY FOR CHRONIC PAIN & ILLNESS

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6 HOUR CONTINUING EDUCATION UNIT CLASS

Approved by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR)  
& the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork  
(NCBTMB)



ONLINE MASSAGE  
— CE CLASSES —

## MASSAGE THERAPY FOR CHRONIC PAIN & ILLNESS

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### **Welcome to the Massage Therapy for Chronic Pain and Illness Class!**

**Class Objective:** This online class has been developed to educate Licensed Massage Therapists to provide safe and effective massage treatments to their clients who are coping with chronic illnesses that affect millions of Americans, such as Heart Disease, Cancer, Fibromyalgia, Arthritis, Depression and Diabetes. It is my hope this material will be an interesting, informative and valuable resource to assist you in working with massage therapy clients. A better understanding of these illnesses and how specific massage modalities can help people with various conditions can greatly enhance your massage practice, while improving the quality of life of the individuals you massage.

## About the Instructor



My name is Melissa Wood and I am a Naturopathic Doctor, Massage Therapy Instructor and Licensed Massage Therapist located in San Antonio, Texas. I have been studying alternative and natural medicine for over 25 years.

My mission is to enable everyone on this planet to be healthy and to be actively involved in their health and healing. My goal is to offer information that will provide you with new insights that are useful in your path to wellness. I envision a time when everyone will seek out herbs, essential oils, vitamins, minerals, nutritional supplements, and whole foods (not processed food!) to help heal themselves, as these are very powerful tools for enhancing your health and well-being.

### **APPROVED MASSAGE THERAPY INSTRUCTOR**

MELISSA WOOD, ND, MTI, LMT  
718 Highway 82 East, Ste 226  
Sherman, TX 75090

National website: [www.onlinemassagececlasses.com](http://www.onlinemassagececlasses.com)

Texas website: [www.texasmassageceu.com](http://www.texasmassageceu.com)

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## Disclaimer

I am a Naturopathic Doctor (N.D.), Massage Therapy Instructor (MTI), Licensed Massage Therapist (LMT), Approved CE Provider in the State of Texas and am an Approved Provider for NCBTMB (National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork). I am NOT a Medical Doctor (M.D.). I have been trained in holistic and natural therapies for the body and do not diagnose any medical condition, nor prescribe any medications. Should you need immediate medical or psychiatric assistance, please telephone 911 or seek immediate treatment at an emergency room hospital. Nothing listed within this e-book class should be considered as medical advice for dealing with a given problem. You should consult your health care professional for individual guidance for specific health problems. It is understood that the author is solely responsible for the content of this work and is **NOT** responsible for your usage of said information either personally or professionally with your clients. In addition, you should ALWAYS encourage your clients to see their health care professionals for help with any medical issues they are having.

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Melissa M. Wood, ND, MTI, LMT



ONLINE MASSAGE  
— CE CLASSES —

# MASSAGE FOR CHRONIC PAIN & ILLNESS 6 CE HOURS

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## **CHAPTER 1 – HELPING CLIENTS WITH SERIOUS AILMENTS TO IMPROVE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE**

Gone are the days when massage is viewed only as a way for people to pamper themselves. In actuality, almost 75% of people who receive massage have already seen a physician to treat a specific health complaint. Massage has become the most commonly used form of integrative medicine among rehabilitation patients, and it is highly favored among physicians as a highly therapeutic complementary therapy.

Like me, and most massage therapists I've met during my career, you no doubt have a deep-rooted desire to help people feel better. More than just an occupation or a way to pay the bills, you feel the most satisfaction when you're able to help a client see drastic improvements in their health and wellness.

Conventional medicine experts in a wide variety of specialties also appreciate and promote the benefits of massage in treating illness. The British Medical Journal (BMJ) reports that “Most massage techniques have a low risk of adverse effects. Contraindications to massage are based largely on common sense (for example, avoiding friction on burns or massage on a limb with deep vein thrombosis) . . . There is no evidence that massage in patients with cancer increases metastatic spread.”

In spite of your ability to work with a variety of conditions with your massage therapy skills and education, have you ever felt some trepidation in working with someone with a chronic illness or advanced cancer? Rather than shying away from patients with conditions like these, the purpose of this course is to improve your knowledge of the most common health problems Americans face. By the time you’re finished, I hope you’ll feel motivated and empowered to give your clients, even those coping with serious illness, the safest and most effective care possible.

### Course Objectives:



#### Cancer:

- Understand cancer, conventional treatments and side effects from those treatments.
- Understand the emotional impact that cancer takes on the client.
- Learn goals of massage therapy and how it can positively affect the client’s health.
- Learn cautions and contraindications for performing massage on someone that has cancer.





- Learn different styles of massage that would be helpful in dealing with clients that are suffering from cancer or the resulting treatments.



### Diabetes:

- Learn what Diabetes is and how it physically affects the people that suffer from it.
- Learn specific benefits of massage for someone that has Diabetes.
- Learn cautions regarding hypoglycemic symptoms when performing massage on someone that has Diabetes.
- Be able to define Neuropathy.
- Learn the different types of massage that would be helpful in clients that have Diabetes.



### Heart Disease:

- Learn about research that promotes massage as beneficial for heart disease and hypertension.
- Learn the different types of massage that would be helpful in clients that have heart disease.
- Learn cautions and contraindications for performing massage on someone that has heart disease or hypertension.



### Chronic Pain:

- Learn and understand the definitions of Fibromyalgia and Osteoarthritis and how it affects the body.
- Learn the different types of massage that would be helpful in clients that have Fibromyalgia or Arthritis.
- Learn cautions and contraindications for performing massage on someone that has Fibromyalgia or Osteoarthritis.



### Anxiety/Depression:

- Identify symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Understand why these illnesses are on the rise.
- Learn how anxiety and depression affect the body.
- Learn how massage affects our physiological health and can help those people that suffer from anxiety and depression.
- Learn why achieving deep relaxation is helpful for those suffering from anxiety and depression.
- Learn the different types of massage that would be helpful in clients that have anxiety or depression.
- Precautions for therapists in dealing with depressed clients.

## **CHAPTER 2 – CANCER**

### **Alleviating Symptoms/Complications from Cancer Treatment**



Most of us know someone that has either had cancer or is undergoing treatment for it. Perhaps you've been touched by this disease as well. Unfortunately, cancer cases are on the rise and there are many different theories for why that is. It can originate almost anywhere in the body and basically happens when there is an abnormal growth of a particular type of cells. There are several different types of cancer:

- **Carcinomas** – cancer that arises from cells that cover external and internal body surfaces like lung, breast and colon.
- **Sarcomas** – cancers that arise from cells found in supporting tissues of the body such as bones, muscles and connective tissue.
- **Lymphomas** – are cancers that happen in lymph nodes
- **Leukemias** – are cancers that happen in the bloodstream

Rather than being something to fear, working with cancer patients can be one of the most rewarding, soul searching, emotionally touching experiences that you may have during your career as a therapist.

Regular massage sessions from a skilled practitioner can make a real difference in the quality of life for those living with cancer. Remember that your goal as a therapist is to help the client:

- relax
- feel good
- aid in enhancing the healing process of the body
- manage pain levels
- reduce soft tissue tension
- regain mobility following treatment
- alleviate stress and depression
- help them return to a normal sleeping pattern which often gets interrupted when having conventional treatments.



Typically, when someone is diagnosed with cancer and undergoes traditional conventional treatments that usually means surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation. All of those will result in side effects

for the patient, although surgery typically has less ongoing side effects than the other treatments.

Side effects from Chemotherapy can often include:

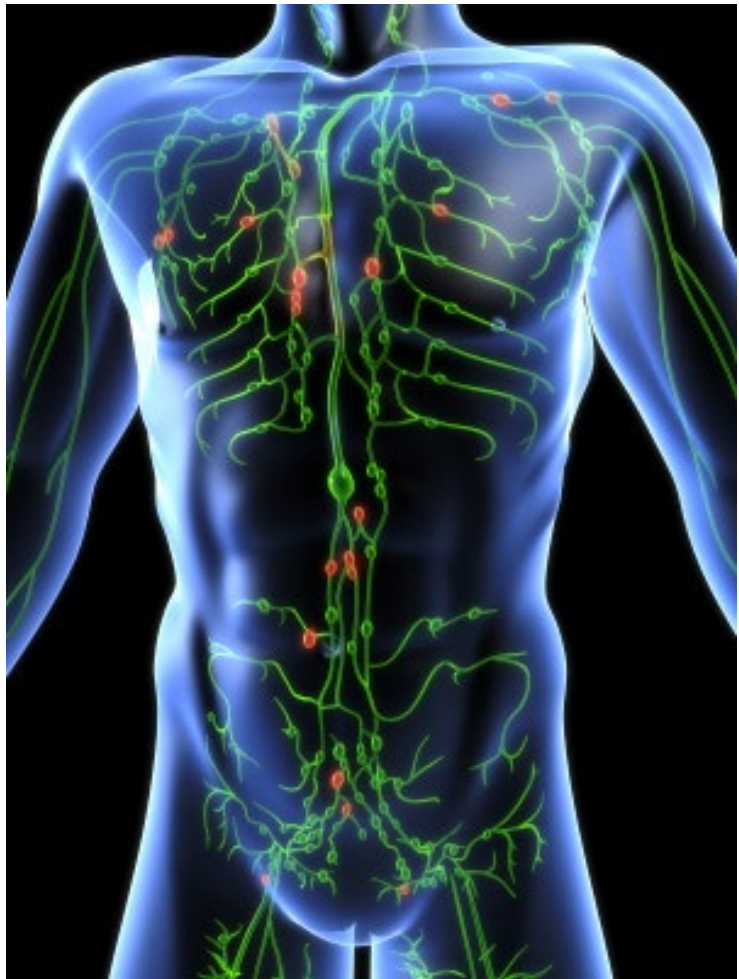
- Hair loss
- Nausea and vomiting
- Debilitating Fatigue
- Mouth Sores
- Nerve Damage
- Immune system suppression
- Diarrhea and/or Constipation
- Frequent infections

Side effects from radiation can often include:

- Skin changes; dryness, itching, peeling
- Hair loss in treatment area
- Nausea and vomiting
- Mouth sores
- Swelling in the body
- Urinary and bladder changes
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea
- Difficulty swallowing



One of the most common side effects from cancer treatment is lymphedema. Lymphedema happens when some lymph nodes (green and red dots in picture) have been removed from the body. This results in fluid backing up in the area that normally would have been transported out of the body, but since the lymph nodes were removed, this results in swelling. For instance, in women who have breast cancer, sometimes the surrounding lymph nodes in



the axillary area will also be found to have cancer. So, surgeons will remove the affected lymph nodes; this then will cause the woman's arm to have severe swelling.

Specific hands-on training in Lymphatic Massage and/or Oncology Massage would be most beneficial in this case to be sure as to not aggravate the condition. Regular Swedish massage sessions can still help this person; just be careful to avoid any areas that have severe swelling from Lymphedema if you're inexperienced and have not had adequate training in Lymphatic Massage.



Massage is also important in the battle against cancer since it promotes relaxation and eases fatigue. Even for those people who have advanced cancer that has progressed past active treatment, massage plays a valuable role in their palliative care to help them remain relaxed and in control of their pain levels. Remember that massage can also be very beneficial for those cancer patients that are in remission from cancer. They may still have swelling (in the event they have Lymphedema)

and pain that results from treatments, so massage would still be helpful and help the body to continue the healing process.

Here are some key considerations when treating a client with cancer:

After rounds of chemotherapy or radiation, a person will feel the effects throughout their entire body. They may experience a host of symptoms including nausea, vomiting, fatigue, hair loss and changes in their skin.

It is vital for you as the massage therapist to learn as much as you can about the specific type of cancer your client has. Be sure to find out what is involved with their medical treatments. In addition to your personal research, take time to speak with the client and their medical team if possible. Since massage is considered a complementary therapy, it can be used in conjunction with conventional traditional medicine and can even help those treatments to be more effective.



***Make sure that your client has approval from their physician or oncologist before beginning massage treatments.***

If there is hesitation on the part of the physician, please reach out and call the physician to introduce yourself and to explain how you would like to help their patient. You may be able to reassure them by explaining that your goal as a Licensed Massage Therapist is to reintegrate the body and to work gently and with caution. They will likely be able to provide you with specific guidelines for your treatment sessions, such as areas that should be avoided, or lighter treatments, when necessary, which will help you to give your client the best care possible.

When speaking with your client's oncologist or physician, make sure that you have a good understanding of:

- current or past cancer treatments (surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, stem cell therapy, bone marrow transplant), etc.
- potential side effects from traditional therapies they are doing
- any additional complications that may affect their care
- medications they are taking
- if there are any particular areas on the body that should be avoided when doing massage.



Continuous communication between you, your client and their medical team will allow you to respond to any changes in your client's health. Although there are only a few types of treatment that contraindicate massage therapy



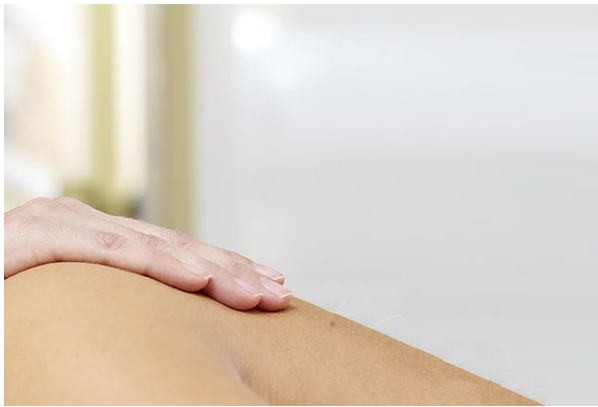
(such as those receiving external beam radiation, severe osteoporosis, or patients whose cancer has metastasized to the bone), it is widely considered safe for people living with cancer. The more informed you are, and the more you keep in contact with their physicians, the better equipped you'll be to assist your client in dealing with their ongoing symptoms and side effects.



### **Understanding the Emotional Impact of Cancer**

One of the most important points to keep in mind is the importance of having empathy for the experience your client is going through. Dealing with cancer is an extremely fearful time for the person and their family. They frequently will be overwhelmed with all the different treatment options available to them; this would include both conventional therapies as well as natural or alternative therapies. Family and friends frequently voice their (sometimes!) very strong opinions on what they should do as well as a medical team that may make them fearful about the different choices that are available. Confusion and fear often result in depression and increased anxiety. Be sure to avoid enforcing your viewpoint or being judgmental of their decisions.

Don't misunderstand their need to talk as them wanting your advice or opinion, ***unless they ask for it!*** Your clients will come to you for more information when (and if) they are ready to do so and will ask your opinion if they want it. Remember that an inevitable part of cancer treatment is extreme fluctuation in the person's emotions. *A listening ear and the best massage session you can offer are the best ways to help a client with serious illness.*



During a massage session, make sure you are in constant contact with your client. What may have been helpful at a previous session may now feel uncomfortable or painful. Plan your treatment carefully and make adjustments each visit as appropriate.

Check in with them to see if anything new has occurred since their last visit with them. See if they have been sick (colds, flu's, stomach problems, etc.); remember that a weakened immune system often is a result of many traditional cancer therapies, so you want to make sure they are physically well enough to receive a massage. Make sure to ask what type of pressure they would like and if there are certain areas of the body that should be avoided. You will also want to keep in mind that a person with cancer will often have more sensitive skin, especially during chemotherapy or radiation. During and following each treatment, you may want to request feedback from them that will allow you to carefully assess and evaluate the pressure and style you are using with them to ensure it fits their needs.



For people living with cancer, massage therapy provides a safe place to rest and an improved sense of well-being. The therapies you provide may also help them to cope with:

- Fear, anxiety, and depression
- Self esteem and body image issues
- Psychological effects of cancer and facing mortality
- Side effects of treatment

### **Appropriate Styles of Massage for People with Cancer**

There are a number of modalities that can be used safely and effectively for clients who are undergoing cancer treatment. However, an effective massage does not necessarily depend on the type of massage given, but on your ability as a therapist to adjust to each individual session - making appropriate modifications according to the client's medical history, age, current health status and individual requests. Remember each visit will likely result in different symptoms so be flexible in your approach and communicate with them about their feelings.

When performed gently and with mild stroke pressure, there is scientific evidence to support the following massage techniques for clients with cancer:



**Therapeutic Grade Essential Oils:** Strongly supported by medical research, essential oils can be very therapeutic in helping your clients to manage their symptoms of sleeplessness, stress and anxiety. Many patients report that receiving treatment with therapeutic essential oils while undergoing chemotherapy allows them to sleep more restfully, which further enables their bodies to begin the healing process. Be sure you only use ***therapeutic grade essential oils***. There is a significant difference between “aromatherapy” oils (the ones found in most stores) and PURE essential oils. There are some specific essential oils that are wonderful to use with cancer patients. If you would like to discuss a client that has cancer and what oils would be good to use, please get in touch with me. Be sure to educate yourself on essential oils as they are very powerful for healing. Common oils like Lavender and Frankincense are wonderful to use for general use in cancer clients. Other oils might be indicated to help with particular symptoms and each client would need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to see what would be in their best interest and to ensure that no contraindicated oil would be given to them.

**Acupressure:** Following the points used in Traditional Chinese Acupuncture, therapists can apply fingertip pressure along energy meridians to relieve symptoms in different organs. Studies show that acupressure can help to ease persistent cancer-related fatigue and nausea caused by chemotherapy. During acupressure sessions, a therapist may incorporate a variety of

techniques involving stretching, massage, and methods from Shiatsu, Tui Na, or Watsu (pressure therapy that is performed in a warm bath) to help the client restore energy flow in the body. Be sure to use gentle pressure when working on the meridian points; now is not the time for any deep, trigger-point therapy as you don't want to use deep pressure in someone that is actively undergoing treatment. But often, light pressure on acupuncture points will help to release tight muscles and help the massage client to relax.

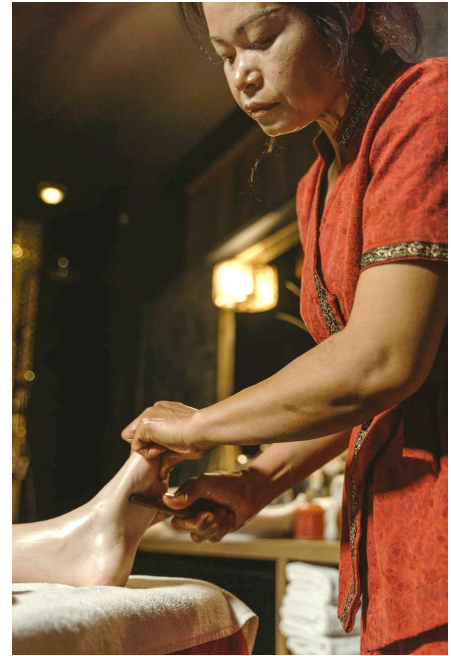


### **Swedish massage:**

Using a light touch and long, flowing strokes, Swedish massage helps to balance and tone soft tissues, stimulate circulation, improve oxygen flow and relax

tense muscle areas. Caution must be taken when massage is given to clients who are undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Due to low blood platelet counts that can be caused by cancer treatments, these clients need to be worked on in a light manner to avoid bruising. **Deep tissue and trigger point therapy should be used with extreme caution or avoided altogether.** An assessment on a case-by-case basis should be done to evaluate each client and their specific needs. Remember that often their skin and veins are going to be hypersensitive because of traditional treatments; therefore, deep tissue and trigger point may not be appropriate for them.

**Reflexology:** If you're dealing with a person that can't tolerate a regular Swedish massage because of pain or skin and vein issues, often a [Reflexology massage session](#) on their feet, hands or ears can do wonders for them. Remember that reflexology is effective because of the points on the bottoms of the feet that correspond to glands and organs within the body. Even if you don't know have knowledge about the specific points on the feet or hands that correspond to their body systems, you can simply rub their hands and fingers or feet and toes and around their ankles. Sometimes, this is all they can tolerate, but using an essential oil like Lavender and rubbing their feet for an hour will feel amazing to them and help them to relax. Adding a warm (not too hot!) and moist towel to one foot, while you work on the other will also feel good to them. See the Appendix for a helpful chart on foot reflexology.



**Reiki:** [Reiki](#) is a type of energy therapy where physical contact with the client is not made. It deals with the energy fields surrounding us and receiving a treatment often treats the whole person: body, mind and spirit. This makes it especially powerful for a person with cancer particularly if they are unable to tolerate a normal Swedish massage. Specific training is needed in Reiki but basically involves the “laying of hands” and direction of thoughts to promote healing in the person.

## Special Considerations for Treating Children with Cancer



As more and more children are diagnosed with cancer each year, new studies are revealing the benefits of massage as a supportive care intervention. Of course, massage techniques using light to medium pressure are the most appropriate in the pediatric oncology setting and you will

need to speak to the child's parents and physicians before beginning treatment.

Bear in mind that children living with cancer may experience side effects that differ significantly from adults. Massage sessions may help them by reducing or eliminating pain, constipation, and high blood pressure. As is true in adults, massage also helps young people to alleviate anxiety, depression and other psychological conditions that can arise from cancer treatments.

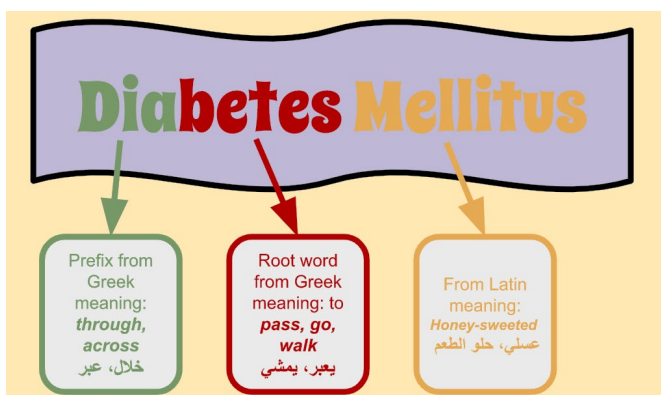
Interestingly, studies have also shown that massage may be beneficial during periods of profound immune suppression as it is known to support immune function. Massage can thus offer a non invasive, effective therapy with a human touch that can have far-reaching benefits in their anti-cancer treatment.

## CHAPTER 3 – DIABETES

There are over 37 million Americans living with Diabetes (more than 11% of the US population).<sup>1</sup> While Type I and Type II Diabetes are diseases with different pathologies, they share the common symptom of elevated blood glucose levels. Having elevated blood sugar has far reaching ramifications that impact every aspect of the person's lifestyle.



In the short term, when a person experiences elevated blood glucose, the body's cells become starved for energy, making the person feel groggy and fatigued. A diabetic individual will also experience frequent urination and thirst due to excess sugar being excreted in the urine.



In the long term, uncontrolled glucose levels can cause serious damage to the body at the cellular level. The most susceptible areas of the body are the nervous system, eyes, kidneys, heart and blood

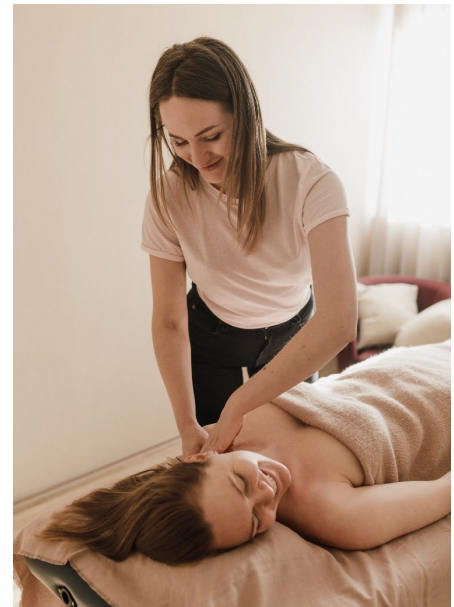
vessels. When treating a diabetic person with massage, it is important to find out what other conditions they may have developed, such as neuropathy, kidney or heart disease and thickening of the fascia.



## The Benefits of Massage for People with Diabetes

Massage has been recommended for people living with diabetes for almost 100 years. Of all the complementary medicine therapies, it has one of the highest physician referral rates. Family practice physicians also rate massage as the form of integrative medicine most likely to be beneficial and least likely to be harmful.

A unique benefit that massage can offer diabetic individuals is an improved sense of well-being. People with diabetes are four times more likely to suffer from depression, although the scientific reasons for this are not yet understood. Several studies have shown positive results in treating diabetic patients with massage therapy.



Massage is an especially beneficial complementary therapy for diabetics, as it can help to improve the body's natural functions in three fundamental ways:

**Circulation:** One of the most positive outcomes from massage treatment is enhanced blood and lymph circulation. By improving the transport and delivery of oxygen and nutrients throughout the body, a client with diabetes will experience better energy levels and overall health. With improved circulation, the insulin uptake at the cellular level is also increased.



**Myofascial Health:** Clients with diabetes will often experience a thickening of their connective tissue due to increased blood sugars. Massage therapy can be used to improve joint mobility and to restore tissue elasticity. Your clients with diabetes will also benefit from instruction in a home stretching routine that they can do on a daily basis to reduce stiffness.

**Reduction of common diabetes symptoms:** Massage at injection sites has been found to improve insulin absorption. Studies also suggest that massage can ease the symptoms of diabetic neuropathy and the loss of reflexes in the extremities. Clients who receive massage also report improvements in feelings of burning, tingling, pain, itching and restless legs that often accompany Diabetes.

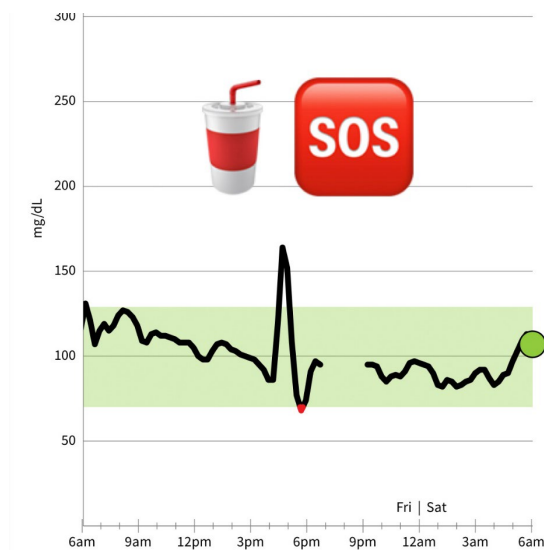
### **Additional Considerations for Your Diabetic Clients**

#### **A Caution Regarding Hypoglycemia**

The deep relaxation that massage therapy provides people with diabetes is not to be underestimated as a positive outcome for clients with diabetes. Living with a debilitating disease that wreaks havoc on the nervous system can have a very negative effect on a person's stress levels and sense of well being.

Additionally, massage has been shown to decrease anxiety in a variety of patient populations, including people with diabetes. These stress-reducing benefits of massage suggest the possibility that massage may be able to further assist diabetics in managing their disease. By inducing the relaxation response, thereby controlling the counter-regulatory stress hormones, the body can use insulin more effectively.

However, certain precautions need to be taken to ensure the safety of your diabetic clients. Clients should be instructed not to schedule massage during the peak of insulin activity. They should also monitor their blood glucose levels immediately before and after their treatment. If their pre-massage levels are low or normal, they may wish to eat or drink something before their massage.



Following a massage therapy session, if a client appears to be confused or lethargic, it is important to consider the possibility of a hypoglycemic episode. Diabetes has a highly unpredictable nature. Even a person who normally can sense their blood sugar dropping can be caught off guard following a deeply relaxing massage.

Be alert for any of the following signs of low blood sugar:

- Clammy skin or excessive sweating
- Confusion or disorientation
- Slurred or slower than normal speech
- Faintness
- Rapid heart rate
- Headache
- Irritability

It may also be a good idea to encourage your clients with diabetes to arrange transportation to and from their massage appointments. Remind them that their glucose levels should be checked closely throughout the day. Working with your client, you will be able to find a good balance and a treatment regime that suits their specific needs

– whether that requires shorter sessions, a rest period halfway through to allow them to check blood glucose levels, or treatments that are booked at an optimum time. Taking these necessary measures will ensure that your client receives a safe and therapeutic massage.



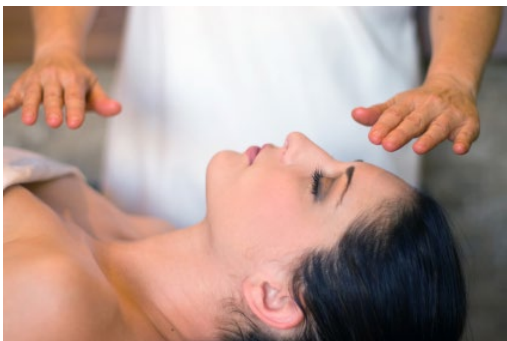
Source: Healthline.  
<https://www.healthline.com/health/diabetes/hypoglycemic-action-plan>

## What You Should Know About Neuropathy

Peripheral neuropathy is a very common complication of diabetes that causes damage to the small nerves, particularly in the hands and feet. It causes the extremities to be highly sensitive to touch. Clients with peripheral neuropathy may prefer that you avoid these areas altogether or use a modified form of massage, acupressure, or reflexology. Most massage therapists report good results from starting with a series of treatments involving only gentle effleurage before proceeding with any additional tissue pressure.

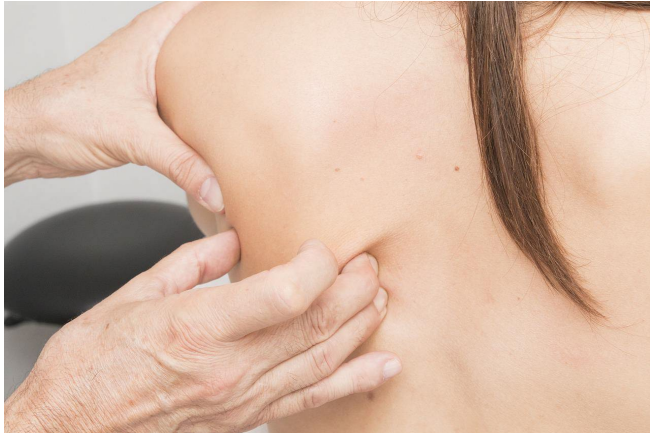
With an understanding of a few precautions, massage can be enjoyed by a person with diabetes with minimal risk of adverse side effects. A good grasp of the most common complications of Diabetes will enable you to adapt your approach accordingly.

### Recommended Massage Techniques for Diabetic Clients



**Body energy therapies:** For a person living with either elevated or below normal blood glucose levels, the impact on their energy levels can drastically affect their day-to-day functions. Diabetics experience a number of symptoms associated with irregular energy responses in the body. Your clients may complain of feelings of depression, irritability, fatigue, or mental fogginess, which are all indicators that the healing practices of Therapeutic

Touch or Reiki may be appropriate. There are several studies that provide evidence of energy therapies' ability to lower blood glucose levels, reduce stress and in some cases, even reduce the length of hospital stays for diabetic patients.



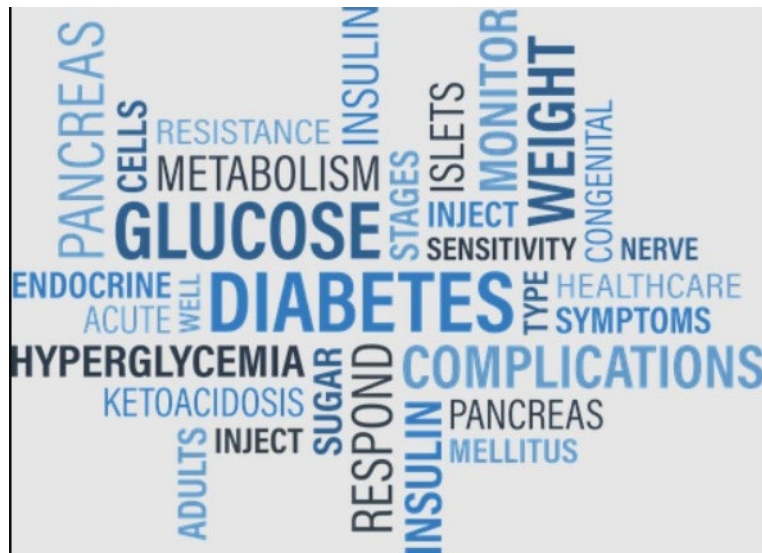
**Shiatsu/Acupressure:** Like acupuncture, which has been shown to change the energy flow in the body through meridians, **acupressure** can influence the meridians using finger pressure instead of needles. Several

studies have indicated that acupressure can improve cardiovascular function by improving blood pressure, heart rate and circulation to the skin. Additionally, acupressure may positively impact the person's neural, lymphatic and biomagnetic mechanisms, causing the body to produce "acupuncture analgesia," a state that is beneficial for diabetics with painful neuropathy. Reducing the chronic pain and sensitivity of neuropathy can have a profound impact on your client's quality of life. Acupressure offers an effective alternative to acupuncture, without the risk of needle site infection that can occur with high blood glucose levels.

**Manual Lymph Drainage** (also known as LDT or Drainage Therapy): this modality requiring a feather-light touch gently removes subcutaneous lymphatic stasis or blockages into the lymphatic channels. Using precise, rhythmic strokes, stagnant lymph can be moved through the vessels and nodes of the superficial lymphatic system.



Diabetes presents people with multiple challenges to contend with on a daily basis—from carefully monitoring their diet—to vigilant blood glucose monitoring and using insulin and medications appropriately. In order to reach their glycemic health goals, most people with diabetes will require multiple interventions. Massage can give a diabetic person a much-needed rest period to rejuvenate their mind, body and spirit, at the same time helping them to attain positive health outcomes.



## **CHAPTER 4 – HEART DISEASE**

The evidence that our emotional and spiritual health have a direct impact on our cardiovascular system has been mounting for several decades. New studies continue to support our understanding of the powerful mind-body connection in relation to heart disease and how this can be used to treat and prevent one of our number one killer.

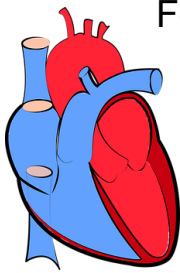


While the importance of making diet and lifestyle modifications cannot be underestimated in treating heart disease, you can also help your clients to achieve physical, emotional, and spiritual health improvements through therapeutic massage. By reducing stress and addressing the toll that associated emotional issues can take on a person's mind and body, you can help your client to not only slow the progression of heart disease, but, as many therapists have found, you may even see the symptoms start to reverse themselves. What an amazing proof of the body's ability to heal and rejuvenate itself when treated holistically!

A study that examined the benefits of myofascial trigger point massage therapy emphasized the powerful effect that massage can have in improving cardiac and immune function.<sup>2</sup> (Note precautions below regarding trigger point therapy for hypertensive patients). Researchers who monitored the cardiovascular function of healthy people found astounding results from treatments on the head, neck, back and shoulders. Following treatment, the participants' heart rates and blood pressure were noted to have dropped



significantly. The change in the recipient's range of heart rates also indicated a beneficial effect on the nervous system, reduced muscle tension and lower stress levels. How can this benefit people with heart disease? Since massage therapy causes immediate effects on the cardiovascular function of healthy individuals, patients with heart disease stand to benefit even more greatly under the care of a skilled massage therapist.



Following a major intervention such as open-heart surgery, clients often experience drastic neurological and psychological changes associated with their procedure. In many medical centers, these symptoms are now addressed as an integral part of their postoperative cardiac surgery care. As a massage therapist, you will be able to ease symptoms that are traditionally difficult to treat with allopathic medicine. Your clients may request massage sessions to treat common symptoms such as insomnia, increased anxiety, and even psychosis following open heart surgery.

### **Studies That Support the Use of Therapeutic Massage for Cardiac Patients**

Massage has been used for thousands of years as a healing modality. As a massage therapist, you've no doubt seen in your practice how body manipulation can be used to improve the movement of energy throughout the body. Using appropriate massage techniques for your clients with heart disease can induce positive outcomes such as deep relaxation, decreased muscle tension, improved sleep habits, and improved blood circulation. Massage has also been demonstrated to have beneficial effects in reducing the anxiety that is common with heart disease patients.



Several recent studies have emphasized the effect of therapeutic touch on individuals with advanced heart disease. One study monitored 90 patients who were hospitalized in a cardiovascular unit. The effects of therapeutic touch, casual touch, or no touch at all were compared after a period of only 5 minutes. The anxiety

scores of the patients, pre- treatment and post treatment, showed a greatly reduced anxiety level among those who received the therapeutic touch. This provides further supporting evidence of the benefit of therapeutic massage for the reduction of both pain and anxiety. In 9 out of 11 recent studies analyzing therapeutic massage, recipients showed significant benefits from their treatment with minimal or no side effects.

World renowned medical centers have used massage therapy in their cardiac units for many years as part of an integrative health program. A report from Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center indicated that almost half of all cardiac patients offered a form of Complementary Medicine (CM) opted for massage therapy. It further states: “The growth of the CM program is primarily patient driven. Many patients requiring cardiac surgery had already explored or used CM treatments and requested that these techniques be somehow integrated into their surgical regimen. In addition, as allopathic clinicians, physicians felt that the emotional, palliative, and/or preventive care requested by patients were areas that surgeons were not well trained

to provide. The CM program could fill this void in the perioperative management of surgical patients.”



There is plenty of scientific research to support the positive outcomes that massage therapy can achieve for patients with heart disease. A study involving patients who were given heart-focused attention noted a response in the individual’s electroencephalographic (EEG) activities which synchronized with the patient’s electrocardiogram. This relationship suggests an intrinsic self-regulation that occurs between the brain and a target organ, such as the heart or lungs. It further indicates that focused therapeutic massage can help to stimulate the body’s self-healing mechanisms.

### What You Should Know About Hypertension

Nearly half (47%!) of American adults have hypertension, which is also known as high blood pressure. In 2019, more than half a million deaths in the United States had hypertension as a primary or contributing cause.<sup>3</sup>

Because this disease is so prevalent, and since massage therapy can affect blood pressure, it’s important to educate yourself before treating a client with hypertension.

Blood pressure is a measurement of the force of the blood as it pushes against the artery walls. A blood pressure reading is composed of systolic and diastolic pressures. These figures indicate the maximum pressure that occurs when the heart is contracting (the top number), and the lowest pressure that occurs when the heart muscle is at rest between heart beats

(the bottom number). Hypertension is generally understood to be either a systolic pressure of 140 or higher, or a diastolic pressure higher than 90.

One of the greatest risks of hypertension is the lack of noticeable symptoms – which is why it is often referred to as a silent killer. Chronic hypertension dramatically increases the risk of heart disease,



myocardial infarctions (heart attacks) and stroke – the first and third most common causes of death among Americans.

Massage has been scientifically proven to be helpful in lowering blood pressure in hypertensive patients. Patients who received 20-minute back massage treatment before diagnostic cardiac catheterization were found to have an average reduction in systolic blood pressure of 8.6 mmHg. The patient's perceived psychological distress was also noticeably reduced. Massage therapy is often prescribed by physicians to reduce anxiety levels in cardiac patients and to create a desirable increase in parasympathetic activity that cannot be attained through conventional medicine.

## What Causes Hypertension?

It is important to note that there are two main categories of hypertension, referred to as primary and secondary. Primary, often called “essential hypertension,” accounts for over 95% of all cases in the United States. Secondary hypertension is generally caused by a separate disease or is sometimes due to chronic substance abuse. There are a number of factors that contribute to primary hypertension, including:

- Family History
- Diet and Lifestyle
- Stress
- Obesity
- Low levels of nitric oxide (a chemical used by the body to dilate the blood vessels)
- Insulin resistance

Of all of these factors, stress is an often-underestimated contributor to high blood pressure. When left



unchecked, stress can develop into negative psychological and physical problems, especially hypertension, chest pain and arrhythmias. When a person experiences stress over an extended period, a cycle of elevated blood pressure, poor eating, insomnia, limited time for exercise and an increased tendency to smoke or drink excessive amounts of alcohol begins. Once the cycle initiates, the damage that stress can do to the body is magnified exponentially.

An added danger of stress is that it exposes the person's body to high levels of adrenaline, cortisol and other unhealthy stress hormones. Studies have shown that stress also causes changes in the body's blood clotting mechanisms, which increases the person's risk of stroke or heart attack.



### Creating a Sensible Therapy Plan for Clients with Heart Disease

As has been previously mentioned, lifestyle and diet modifications are an essential step in treating heart disease and lowering blood pressure. Prescription medication is also indicated to manage blood pressure levels and prevent further organ damage.

In addition to following their physician's advice to take sensible measures to reduce their blood pressure, such as developing a regular exercise program, achieving an optimum weight and eliminating harmful habits like smoking and heavy drinking, you can also assure your clients that massage therapy is a safe, effective (and enjoyable!) way to improve their blood pressure.



Specific massage modalities should be selected to help your clients with hypertension or heart disease. Research has shown that some therapies are able to reduce the pressure inside the artery's walls, while other modalities can actually increase that pressure.

The following techniques are suggested as safe and appropriate massage modalities for Cardiac patients:

**Swedish massage:** The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine reports that of all types of massage treatment studies, Swedish massage was the most effective in blood pressure reduction. During a Swedish massage, nerve receptors in the skin, connective tissue and muscle tissue are stimulated to send messages to the central nervous system, causing deep relaxation. In turn, these reflexes increase parasympathetic activity, leading to vasodilation and ultimately causing improvements in blood pressure and heart rates.

**Reflexology:** A therapy based on the principle that reflex areas in the feet, hands and ears correspond to every part of the body. Since it treats the body as a whole, reflexology can be helpful in helping the cardiovascular system as a whole. This is a suitable modality in situations where body massage is contraindicated, especially for post-surgical patients or individuals with uncontrolled blood pressure, reflexology can be offered as a safe alternative. Manual stimulation of points on the hands and feet can produce a desirable reflex response that improves cardiac function and induces relaxation. A great Reflexology chart can be found in the Appendix.



**Cranio-Sacral Therapy:** This therapy encourages the body to reset and normalize the rhythm of cerebrospinal fluid. Developed by an osteopath over 30 years ago, CranioSacral Therapy focuses on the rhythmic pulse of the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. CranioSacral Therapy involves working with the spine and the skull and gently balancing the two to bring harmony to the client. This is an extremely powerful therapy that is done very gently to help the central nervous system to balance. This therapy has been used by integrated medical physicians around the world to ease hypertension and a host of other chronic conditions.



**Therapeutic Essential Oils:** An often-overlooked modality, therapeutic grade essential oils have been shown to have excellent results in cardiac patients. Researchers have found that having individuals inhale a particular blend of essential oils once per day for a one-month period were able to lower their blood pressure. There are other oils that have been found to be effective in improving cardiovascular activity. Please educate yourself on pure therapeutic grade oils vs. synthetic aromatherapy products which are available in most stores. Synthetic oils should be not used on your clients because of their toxic ingredients. A pure oil like Lavender has wonderful relaxing qualities for most people.



## Specific Cautions and Contraindications for Cardiac Patients

There are a number of factors that contribute to high blood pressure in the long term and there are also many factors that can cause a temporary blood pressure spike. Receiving an intense or painful massage treatment is one of these reasons. Researchers have determined that both trigger point therapy and sports massage can increase an individual's systolic blood pressure reading. Since these deep pressure massage techniques were found to have an undesirable effect on cardiac patients, the conclusion should also be made that other potentially painful modalities should also be avoided for clients with any form of heart disease.

As a skilled and responsible massage therapist, you will need to communicate on an ongoing basis with your client about the status of their hypertension and/or heart disease condition. If one of your clients with uncontrolled hypertension requests a massage, make sure to obtain approval from their physician prior to their massage.



Taking appropriate precautions will allow you to make a valuable contribution to your client's cardiac care. Armed with important background information and a customized plan of massage techniques and modalities, you will be able to provide therapy with a desirable effect that is hard to achieve through any other means. By enhancing blood circulation, eliminating wastes and improving vessel dilation, massage therapy eases body tension and blood pressure, improving an individual's cardiac health overall.

# **CHAPTER 5 – CHRONIC PAIN/FIBROMYALGIA AND OSTEOARTHRITIS**



## **Chronic Pain / Fibromyalgia**

In 2021, research showed that one out of every five Americans are coping with chronic or recurring pain.<sup>4</sup>

Center on chronic pain reported that more than 50% of Americans are coping with chronic or recurring pain. The same poll revealed that more than a quarter of all Americans have used massage therapy to treat their chronic pain.

## **Fibromyalgia Relief with Massage**

Fibromyalgia is a complex and debilitating syndrome. According to the National Fibromyalgia Association there are 5-8 million Americans coping with this disorder.<sup>5</sup> One of the biggest challenges it presents is the difficulty in obtaining a clear diagnosis and an effective treatment plan. While traditional medicine has little to offer people who suffer from Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS), as a massage therapist, you can do much to help your clients with FMS to manage or even relieve their pain and obtain a higher quality of life.

## What is Fibromyalgia?

The most significant symptom of fibromyalgia is widespread, chronic pain. Many patients describe their pain as a deep aching feeling, although they can also describe the pain as burning, gnawing, or stabbing.

Unfortunately, the cause of fibromyalgia and its pathology is not completely understood. There is no simple, definitive diagnostic test available and unfortunately, modern medicine has yet to find a cure for the chronic pain it causes. While the specific trigger for FMS still puzzles physicians and researchers alike, it is commonly believed that traumatic events may contribute to the onset of symptoms. Events such as a severe infection, car accident or tragic personal events are suspected to increase the risk of developing the disease.

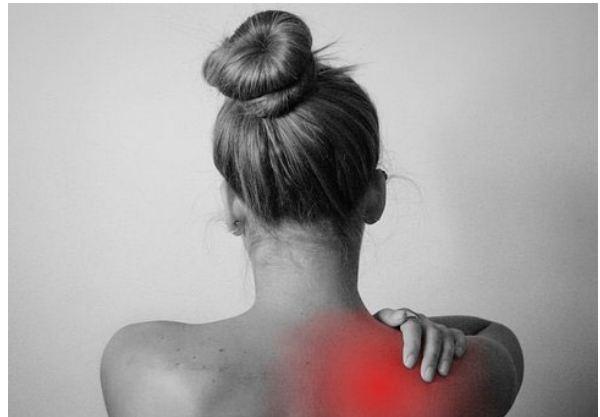
### Conditions associated with fibromyalgia.

Musculoskeletal	Genitourinary	Gastro intestinal	Miscellaneous
• Nondermatomal paresthesia	• Dysmenorrhea	• Irritable bowel syndrome	• Tension/migraine headaches
• Temporo mandibular joint syndrome	• Interstitial cystitis	• Esophageal dysmotility	• Mitral valve prolapsed
• Hyper mobility syndrome	• Vulvodynia		• Allergy
• Restless legs syndrome	• Female urethral syndrome		• Vestibular disorders
• Rheumatoid arthritis	• Vulvar vestibulitis		• Ocular disturbances
• Systemic lupus erythematosus	• Premenstrual syndrome		• Anxiety disorders
• Sjögren syndrome			• Reynaud phenomenon
• Osteoarthritis			• Thyroid dysfunction
• Chronic fatigue syndrome			• Lyme disease
• Carpal tunnel syndrome			• Hyperventilation
• Myofascialpain syndrome			• Cognitive dysfunction

Experts also believe there is a link between the central nervous system, hormone function and neurochemical levels with FMS. People with the disorder will often require the care of a medical team including a neurologist, rheumatologist and endocrinologist, in addition to complementary therapists to help them cope with the complex symptoms associated with FMS.

## How Massage Treatments Can Ease the Pain of Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia sufferers will often seek the help of a skilled massage therapist who has experience in treating their painful syndrome. The following section will help you to understand which techniques are the most helpful, and what precautions you can take to



ensure that your treatment sessions are effective. A study from the Touch Research Institute at the Miami School of Medicine substantiated that the symptoms of fibromyalgia respond well to massage therapy. Rheumatologists who worked on this study reported that patients receiving regular massage therapy treatments experienced a number of positive effects, including improved quality of sleep, decreased pain levels, less fatigue, and reduced muscle stiffness.

During massage sessions with a client suffering from Fibromyalgia, you will need to be aware of pain that is often associated with certain sensitive spots (sometimes called tender points by clinicians), which are markers that aid in diagnosing the syndrome. In addition to these spots, many people with FMS experience pain that is associated with myofascial trigger points. Due to the

constant fluctuations of pain that your client may feel, communication during the massage process is vitally important. Whether the pain originates in trigger points or tender spots that are specific to the individual, pain levels



can fluctuate widely and are affected by a number of factors including the person's physical environment and their emotional state.

Make sure to discuss your client's current symptoms and preferences before beginning each session and encourage them to give you

feedback throughout the massage. Reassure them that you are happy to adapt your technique to make sure they are comfortable. A note of caution to therapists who tend to rely on their tactile sensitivity, intuition or responsiveness: Clients who have suffered for months or years with the chronic pain associated with FMS will have developed an unconscious ability to mask their pain. In addition to being alert to tissue quality and resistance to touch, verbal communication is an essential part of a therapeutic treatment that will prevent you from doing harm or causing your client unnecessary discomfort.

Begin each session slowly to allow your client to relax and to be able to identify painful areas. You will likely notice that clients with FMS have tender points that are cool to the touch. This indicates reduced circulation to the area. Apply heat to tender areas if possible or use light effleurage to warm the muscles. This will allow you to understand your client's sensitivity, tolerance levels and their specific target areas. As you continue providing

your client with regular massage sessions, their blood and lymph circulation will improve drastically. The client's temperature variations will eventually normalize, allowing better tissue oxygenation, and ultimately leading to reduced stiffness and severity of pain.

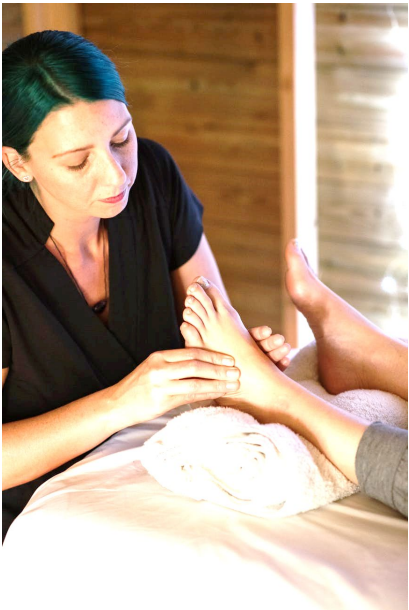
There are a number of specific massage techniques that can be used to treat fibromyalgia pain. The needs of FMS patients can vary significantly from one individual to the next - some of your clients may request gentle techniques, while others may feel more benefit from deep tissue work and trigger point therapy.



***Remember to treat each person individually – each person is unique and therefore they can have very different symptoms and levels of pain from one another so be sure to ask!***

For those suffering from chronic pain, a main concern is to avoid over stimulating an already fatigued nervous system, so moderate techniques are important.

**Here is an overview of several techniques and why they are appropriate for individuals with FMS:**



**Reflexology:** A therapy based on the principle that reflex areas in the feet, hands and ears correspond to every part of the body. Since it treats the body as a whole, reflexology can be helpful in easing the cluster of symptoms that often occur with FMS. Reflexology points can be mapped out on the feet (similar maps are also represented on the ears and hands), providing a systematic, anatomical pattern that can help a therapist to pinpoint the source of a client's pain.

Reflexology can be used to relieve tension, improve circulation and to support the body's natural healing functions. A great reflexology chart can be found in the Appendix.

**CranioSacral Therapy:** A highly valued treatment among FMS sufferers, this therapy encourages the body to reset and normalize the rhythm of cerebrospinal fluid. Developed by an osteopath over 30 years ago, CranioSacral therapy focuses on the rhythmic pulse of the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. A recent study that involved more than 90 fibromyalgic patients who were treated with CranioSacral therapy showed that recipients experienced a significant reduction in pain in their most tender points after a 20-week period. A year later, those individuals who had received treatment still exhibited less tender point pain and sensitivity.

Since there is no deep tissue work involved, CranioSacral therapy is an ideal modality for fibromyalgia sufferers. During CranioSacral treatments, the therapist lightly touches specific points on the head and neck to feel the pulse of the fluid and to check for any obstructions to the flow of fluid. These obstructions can lead to or indicate abnormalities in the brain, spine and nervous system that are common for sufferers of fibromyalgia.

Once proper rhythm has been restored, physical adjustments to the myofascia can be performed. CST is known to incite emotional releases, which can often aid in improving or eliminating chronic pain.

**Swedish massage:** The most recommended form of therapy for the pain associated with Fibromyalgia. Research indicates that Swedish vibration techniques, either by hand or with equipment, are highly effective in releasing pent-up muscle tension in clients with FMS. Using long, gliding movements like effleurage combined with kneading and tapping techniques, Swedish massage can reduce muscle tension and increase the amount of oxygen that



is delivered to the muscles. This therapy helps to flush out toxins that have built up over time and improve the function and health of the person's muscle system.

**Myofascial Release:** Originally developed by a physical therapist, this technique will allow you to decrease tightness in the fascia. By systematically stretching the fascia and the muscles they surround, a massage therapist can assess the function of the fascia and check for any uneven areas. The response from the patient's



body indicates to the therapist how much pressure will be required to stretch the fascia safely and effectively. Following each set of stretches, the tissue is allowed an interval of rest. The stretch is increased gradually each time until the fascia is completely relaxed. By actually lengthening the body and restoring vertical alignment, more space is provided for each of a person's muscles, bones, and organs to function properly. For Fibromyalgic individuals, regaining this balance can mean that the accompanying pain and stiffness will often vanish. The body will regain its natural ability to correct itself and body mechanics will be greatly improved.

**Passive Stretching:** (also referred to as static-passive stretching) can be helpful in reducing muscle tension and spasms. By maintaining a stretch

position for your client while they allow the rest of their body to relax, the person will often experience an immediate improvement in their flexibility and range of motion. Providing your clients with specific passive



stretching exercises that they can do at home will help them to see even more positive results, particularly in reducing muscle fatigue and soreness.

**Proprioceptor Neuromuscular Facilitation:** can be used in addition to passive stretching to further lengthen a muscle. Having your client push against your resistance in targeted muscle groups can be very beneficial in treating hypertonic muscles.



## **Therapeutic Grade Essential Oils:**

Therapeutic essential oils can have a number of very positive effects on a client with fibromyalgia. In the bloodstream, therapeutic grade essential oils work positively by fighting infection, bringing oxygen and nutrition to tissues while at the same time helping to eliminate waste products and toxins. This increases the immune system function and aids in healing. Essential oils can also act on the central nervous system and can be relaxing or stimulating depending on which oil is used. Many oils have the ability to bring about balance, which can either have a sedative effect or be stimulating depending upon the unique needs of the individual. Certain therapeutic grade essential oils can help calm down pain receptors that make them very good choices for people with Fibromyalgia. An essential oil like Lavender would be great to help your client relax; Frankincense contains properties that are great for anti-inflammatory purposes. If you would like some help in picking certain oils for your Fibro clients, feel free to get in touch with me for guidance.

## **What You Should Know About Flare Ups**

If you are asked by one of your clients to provide massage therapies during a flare-up, it is important to understand the associated symptoms so you can modify your technique appropriately. For some clients, deep tissue massage, vigorous strokes or neuromuscular techniques can cause rebound tenderness or even trigger further flare ups.

During a flare up, symptoms of pain intensify and additional symptoms can also develop. Depression, poor sleep and an inability to concentrate are



among the most common complaints. These symptoms indicate insufficient oxygen levels in the brain and muscle systems. By treating your client with FMS using suitable techniques, you will improve their body's tissue oxygenation, which is critical during a flare up episode. During the early onset of a flare up, or even during the acute phase, experts in FMS recommend using a combination of myofascial release and CranioSacral therapy to

help the client restore their musculoskeletal balance. Energy techniques can also be used where possible to remove blockages and encourage deep relaxation.

## Other Ways You Can Help

Follow up care is very important for all clients, but especially for those suffering from FMS! Remind your clients not to over do it following their session, even if they leave feeling energized and symptom-free. The day after the treatment, your client may experience soreness, especially in areas of the body where trigger points were treated.

**Hydration is essential for FMS patients.** A helpful gesture is to provide a bottle of water for them to drink throughout the treatment and another one for them to take with them. Encourage your client to continue to drink plenty of water once they return home and if possible, to have a warm



Epsom salts bath with a therapeutic essential oil like Lavender or Marjoram to soothe muscle tissues. This will promote a restful sleep and help to prevent muscle soreness.

One of the most complex and debilitating pain syndromes that has been identified, the symptoms of FMS impact every part of the sufferer's life. An integrative health care strategy is widely accepted by both people who suffer from the syndrome and experts in the field as the best approach for managing symptoms. You can offer your clients with FMS a beneficial and restorative way of coping with their symptoms. By decreasing pain levels, relaxing hypertonic muscles, improving blood and lymph circulation and improving their overall feeling of well-being, you can provide treatments that create a very positive outcome for people suffering from chronic pain syndromes.

### How Massage Can Ease the Pain of Osteoarthritis



The risk of developing osteoarthritis increases with age. As we get older, the water content of cartilage increases, and its protein structure starts to degenerate. Repetitive movements over time can lead to inflammation of the cartilage, eventually eroding it away. In advanced cases, there is a total loss of the cartilage cushion between bones. This causes friction that leads to pain, inflammation and severely reduced joint mobility. Osteoarthritis can occur within any joint, but most often affects the hands and weight-bearing joints, particularly the knee, hip and spine.

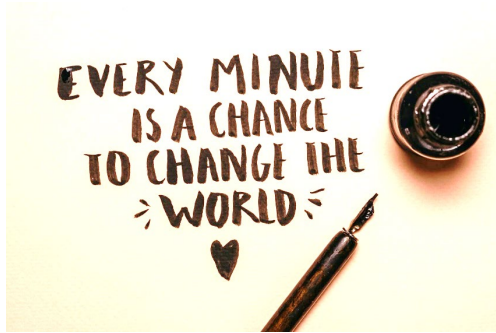
Arthritis and their related illnesses are all characterized by pain, swelling and joint or muscle stiffness. Osteoarthritis (also known as degenerative arthritis) affects more than 20 million people in the U.S. alone, making it the most common form of the disease.



While long-term medication or even drastic measures such as surgery may seem like the only solution for a person suffering from chronic arthritis pain, many individuals who have tried these interventions have found that they can also have serious drawbacks and side effects. The most commonly prescribed steroids, muscle relaxants and anti-inflammatory medications are often responsible for a host of possible side effects. They also make the individual susceptible to pharmacological dependence and tolerance, meaning that the person will continually have to increase the dosage of their medication to achieve the desired effects. Even surgery is often found to be only a temporary solution and runs the risk of causing serious complications.

These facts emphasize the important role that we as massage therapists can play to improve the quality of life for people living with osteoarthritis. A study of arthritis sufferers who received weekly Swedish Massage treatment revealed improvements in pain levels, joint mobility and muscle stiffness. Therapeutic massage has been found to be so effective that many patients with mild arthritis opt for massage treatments as an alternative to long term anti-inflammatory prescription medications.

## Setting Specific Treatment Goals



The main goal of massage treatments for arthritis sufferers is to reduce their pain by improving blood circulation to the affected area. Since individuals with this disease generally have a poor network of vasculature in their joint cartilage, massage can increase circulation to flush wastes and bring fresh, oxygenated blood to a chronically painful area. In addition to reducing pain and inflammation, another positive outcome of improved circulation is a vast improvement in joint mobility.

It is no surprise that massage has become an ideal form of therapy for people suffering from osteoarthritis. When performed properly by a skilled practitioner, massage helps sufferers to attain a profound state of relaxation and reduces the inflammatory chemicals that cause pain.

### Specific Modalities to Benefit Your Clients with Osteoarthritis

**Swedish massage:** Researchers from Yale Prevention Research Center recently concluded that Swedish massage therapy is a highly effective way to reduce pain for arthritis sufferers, with the unique advantage of minimal or no side effects. A 16-week study indicated that adults with osteoarthritis of the knee can benefit greatly from this type of therapy. During the study, the patient's pain, stiffness and range of motion were monitored. The participants received a one-hour Swedish Massage treatment twice a week for four weeks, followed by treatments once a week for the following four weeks.



After completing the eight weeks of massage therapy, participants reported having ***improved flexibility, reduced pain and an improved range of motion***. What is really interesting, however, is that when participants were reassessed eight weeks *after* their final massage session, the benefits they experienced still remained significant. Thus, experts in the field of osteoarthritis confirm that massage therapy shows strong therapeutic potential to become a first line of defense for people suffering with arthritic pain.

**Hydrotherapy (Balneotherapy):** Hydrotherapy is a unique modality to add to massage sessions that involves having your client soak in hot or cold-water baths, vapor baths, mineral or mud baths and other applications. Clients can also be given all or part of their massage treatment while submerged in water. Balneotherapy is becoming increasingly popular in spas and massage clinics around the world.



A recent study from the Institute of Rheumatology at the University of Siena found that patients who were given two weeks of mineral baths and mudpack treatments per year for two consecutive years showed significant improvements in their symptoms of osteoarthritis. Hydrotherapy was also found to reduce the frequency of hospital stays, days off work and prescription medication that is often associated with this disease.

Researchers have also found that clients suffering from osteoarthritis of the knee who were given hot mineral baths once a week showed a significant reduction in joint pain and stiffness. Even if your practice is not currently equipped to provide hydrotherapy, you can modify this treatment by using a variety of simple techniques, such as warm herbal compresses or hot stone therapy, which also offer highly soothing and therapeutic effects.

**Therapeutic Grade Essential Oils:** Therapeutic grade oils carry within them the chemical properties and constituents to relieve pain and suffering in people who suffer from joint problems. There is a significant difference between “aromatherapy” oils and pure, therapeutic-grade essential oils. Pure essential oils are extremely powerful and should be used with great care and by a therapist who is educated in their use. Many oils contain chemical constituents that can not only help to control pain, but also heal the affected area. For instance, I once was starting to develop arthritis in my hands, but using a specific essential oil called PanAway, helped to ease the pain and keep the arthritis crystals from forming. Other oils like pure Frankincense and Marjoram can help ease for those people suffering from arthritis symptoms.



If you are called upon in your practice to treat one of the millions of Americans coping with osteoarthritis, be motivated by the fact that massage offers enormous promise in treating this debilitating disease. Clinical trials provide even more evidence that enhanced circulation from Swedish massage improves joint health and reduces chronic pain.



## **CHAPTER 6 – STRESS, ANXIETY & DEPRESSION**



Psychologist Dr. Edmund J. Bourne calls anxiety a “built-in feature of the modern world.”

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety disorders are the number one mental health issue among women. Among men, anxiety is second only to alcohol and drug abuse. 40 million Americans have experienced panic attacks, phobias or anxiety disorders in the past year alone and 1-in-4 people will suffer from some sort of anxiety disorder during their lifetime.

**Anxiety disorders** are believed to stem from cumulative stress over time. Unlike specific fears or phobias, anxiety is the body’s response to an uncertain threat, such as economic crises, terrorism or natural disasters.

There are many different types of anxiety disorders, and it will take a trained medical professional to accurately diagnose a particular condition. Be sure to refer your clients to a qualified healthcare provider for a diagnosis if you suspect a client might have an anxiety disorder.



Here are some of the more common anxiety disorders:

- Panic Disorder-described as period(s) of intense fear or discomfort that results in physical symptoms like racing heart, sweating, shortness of breath, dizziness, trembling or shaking.
- Phobias like Agoraphobia which is having anxiety about being in places or situations in which escape is unlikely, feeling trapped like in traffic or the grocery store. Other phobias like being afraid of snakes or spiders.
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder happens when people have unwanted repetitive thoughts, images or urges that might result in unwanted behaviours such as washing their hands obsessively or double-checking locks 25 times before leaving the house.
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder happens when people have chronic, frequent worry about topics like family, money worries or illness concerns.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) happens when a person is exposed to a threat to their physical self like in cases of assault, war, combat, fire, accident abuse, etc.



**Depression** is a long-lasting disorder of the central nervous system that can become a serious, debilitating disease. More than the ups and downs we all experience, clinical depression causes a person to lose the ability to cope with their daily routine or to find enjoyment in their life.

While experts suggest that approximately 10-20% of Americans experience an episode of depression each year, many people are hesitant to seek help

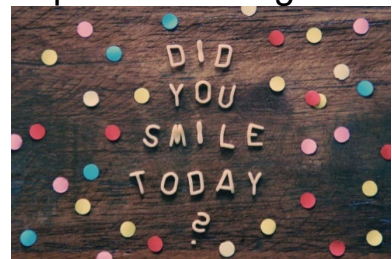
for symptoms of clinical depression, so the actual number of cases is believed to be much higher.



The most common indications that physicians use to diagnose depression are:

- feelings of sadness, hopelessness, irritability or restlessness that last for several days or weeks
- loss of interest in activities that were previously enjoyed
- low energy or fatigue that is not relieved by sleeping
- sudden weight loss or gain, with a change in appetite
- inability to make decisions
- suicidal thoughts

Medical intervention, and (sometimes) prescription medication, is critical in coping with clinical depression, especially for individuals with an increased risk of suicide. Massage therapy is not meant to be a replacement for antidepressant medications, but as part of an integrative health strategy, it can help an individual to restore their mood and energy levels more rapidly. It can also be helpful in easing the side effects of prescription drugs.





our physical, mental and emotional health. For instance, most people have to juggle a number of pursuits - commuting to their job, obtaining a degree or updating their skills and education, running a household, shuttling kids to soccer and dozens of other activities that require our time and energy. This is not to mention the mental and emotional toll of trying to make ends meet—while dealing with the pressure to keep up with the Joneses'!

More and more people are coping with serious family issues as well – whether caring for an elderly parent or relative or a child with Autism or dealing with the challenges of a blended family following a divorce. The bottom line is that no one can escape the anxiety and stress of living in our modern world. And all of these factors have a cumulative effect that can cause a person's cortisol levels to get out of hand, with stress as the result. Almost everyone you meet in your daily life suffers from stress in one of these forms which makes them a suitable candidate for massage therapy.

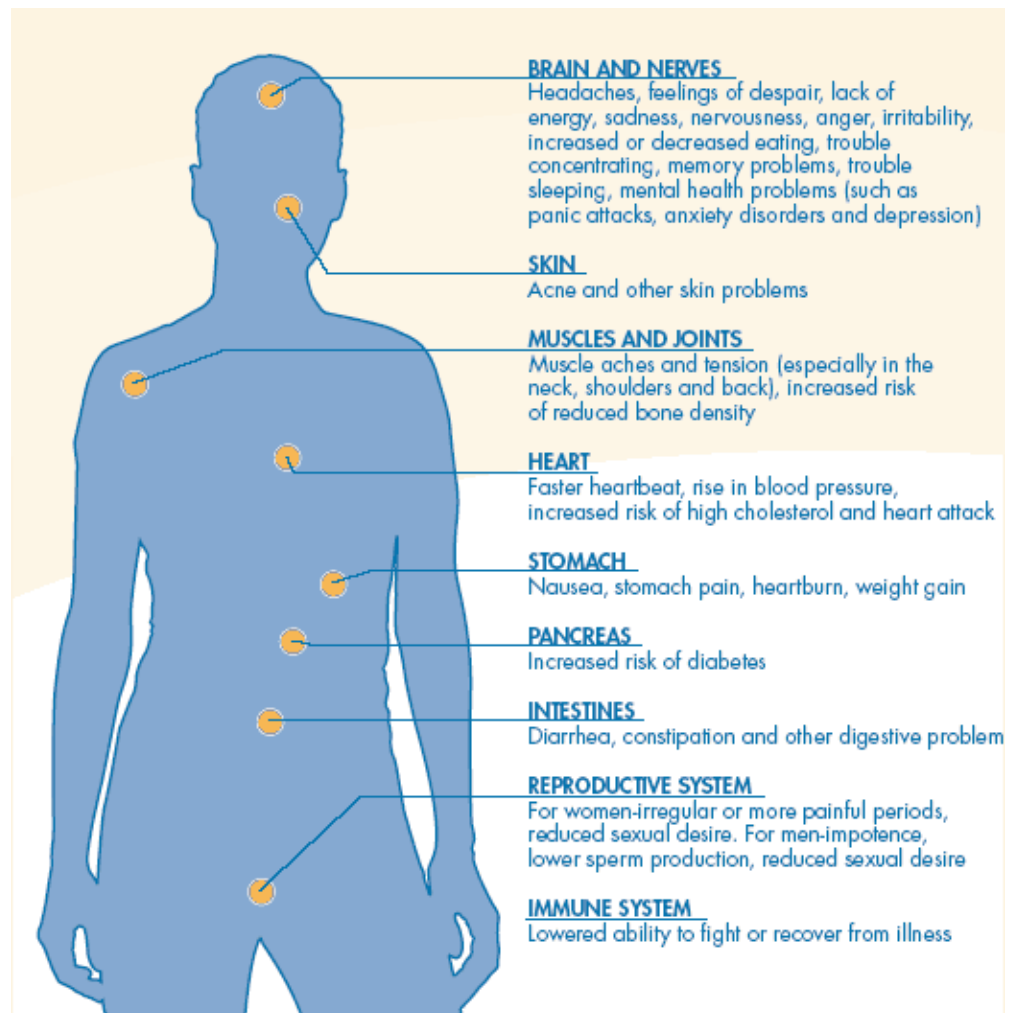
Simply put, anxiety disorders arise when people are no longer able to cope with the resulting stress that builds up in their minds and bodies. The



cycle begins with worry, which leads to anxiety, causing stress signals to increase, which ultimately results in illness.

Here is what happens inside our bodies when faced with long term stress and anxiety:

The human brain is made of three essential areas which are all interdependent and responsible for every function in our bodies.



The hindbrain is responsible for basic survival and vital body functions.

The limbic system processes emotions and the cerebral cortex is where our minds are able to assimilate and interpret events.

When an event sets off worry signals in a person's cerebral cortex, anxiety will be felt in the limbic system, leading to stress in the hindbrain. Left untreated, the chain effect of this brain activity will ultimately cause illness in the body.

## The Value of Therapeutic Touch in Treating Anxiety and Depression



Consider in our western world how little physical touch we receive in our day to day lives. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the social boundaries of our society made it ill-advised to touch others, especially in dealing with strangers or in the workplace.

However, take a look at how often people touch in other cultures around the world and it is no surprise that America has one of the world's highest levels of depression and anxiety. In Southeast Asian cultures, people view massage as a necessary part of a person's health routine, and it's common for entire families to share the same bed. In several African countries, both males and females like to hold hands with their friends when walking together and babies are carried close to their mothers in a sling every day for the first 2 years of their life. In Europe, people having a conversation touch each other an average of 100 times per hour, whereas Americans tend to touch each other only 10 times!

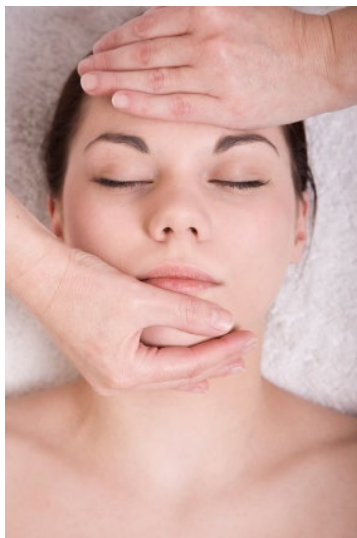
In spite of our minimal-touch society, the New York Times reports that even simple gestures of touch can change a person's brain chemistry. Research shows that small acts such as shaking hands or a comforting squeeze of the arm affects a person's mood and



enhance feelings of calm and wellbeing throughout the body. Studies on animals also suggest that feelings of stress or burnout that are hard to shake may result from a lack of tactile stimulation. In humans, this means that touch deprivation may exacerbate or even cause depression. Sadly, clinical depression often leads a person to isolate themselves even further from human touch and interaction, which only worsens their feelings of depression.

### How Massage Helps at the Physiological Level

In addition to the therapeutic value of touch - which simply makes us feel good - massage causes beneficial reactions at a physiological level for depressed people, including:



#### **Healthier hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis**

**functioning:** A hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis that works efficiently can quickly counteract the chemical changes that occur when the brain perceives a threat. When this system is weakened, harmful chemicals linger in the body (cortisol for instance - your flight or fight hormone), which extends the amount of time that the person will feel the effects of stress. Over the long term, this can be

harmful to the body by extending the amount of time the body perceives it is under stress. As a result, health illnesses and dis-ease can erupt. Therapeutic massage can help the body to get rid of those harmful chemicals and thereby help the body to relax.



**Redistribution of the brain's electrical activity:** A brain that functions with right and left lobe symmetry reduces the risk of clinical depression. Here's why: Research in the Electroencephalogram (EEG) activity of individuals during a massage indicates a change in brain activity in the area associated



with moods. While patients were given a massage treatment, a shift in activity was observed from the right frontal lobe, generally associated with feelings of sadness, to the left frontal lobe, which is generally associated with feelings of happiness, or at least toward

better balance between the two lobes. An improved distribution of electrical activity within the brain can have far reaching effects on a person's mental and emotional state.

**Restoration of the body's natural balance of hormones and neurotransmitters:** By increasing serotonin and endorphin secretion and decreasing cortisol levels, the body undergoes several physiological changes as well as increased parasympathetic activity. Improved serotonin and endorphins help people to feel good, while cortisol does the opposite, by sending signals of pain and stress throughout the body. A person with high cortisol levels will exhibit a weakened immune system, poor sleep habits and mood changes due to their decreased dopamine levels.

Numerous studies indicate that massage and therapeutic touch are effective in decreasing undesirable hormone levels. Researchers at L.A.'s Cedars-Sinai Medical Center studied cases of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

following Hurricane Katrina. Their study revealed that adults who received a combination of deep tissue and light massage treatments showed significant decreases in their cortisol levels, among other positive outcomes, most notably: fewer days in bed, increased energy and reduced need for prescription medications.

## Achieving Deep Relaxation

Helping your clients to achieve a state of deep relaxation is a fundamental step in assisting them to overcome anxiety. First described by Herbert Benson in 1975 as the “relaxation response,” it is much more than just the relaxation that people can attain by having a hot bath or reading a favorite book. Deep relaxation is a physiological state that causes the body to respond in ways that are the exact opposite as it does when under stress.



When you help your client to experience deep relaxation from massage, they will undergo a number of physiological changes including:

- Decreased heart rate, respiratory rate and blood pressure
- Reduced muscle tension, metabolic rate and oxygen consumption

- Lower tendency to have uncontrolled thoughts and excessively analytical thinking
- Improved skin texture and tone
- Increased alpha wave activity in the brain—which translates into feeling good!

As a person gradually allows themselves to unwind and let go of muscle tension, you can help them to attain a state of deep relaxation.

Providing the body with a state of rest at

regular intervals allows the body to restore itself from the ravages of stress.

In time, many clients observe a general improvement in their day-to-day feelings of relaxation that will slowly expand into the rest of their life. This process will help them to cope with periodic fluctuations in symptoms of depression and anxiety and to show improvements in generalized anxiety disorder and panic attacks.



For people that have specific complaints that are associated with stress, therapeutic massage can help by helping the client to:

- Have more restful sleep and reduced incidences of insomnia
- Have a reduction in the occurrence of migraine headaches
- Possess an improved ability to concentrate
- Have increased energy levels and productivity
- Have a decrease in blood pressure



## Recommended Therapies for Your Clients with Anxiety, Stress or Depression

There are a number of healing modalities that can ease the physical and emotional symptoms of stress, anxiety, burnout and depression. Emotionally speaking, massage has been found to improve the self-confidence and availability of feelings for people suffering from anxiety and depression. Muscle tension can pose a significant barrier in a person's awareness of their own feelings. Physically, massage can benefit your clients who are coping with stress to improve blood and lymphatic circulation. By removing metabolic waste products, muscular tension can be alleviated. It also incites the brain to release endorphins, which boosts a person's mood instantly and improves their overall sense of balance and well-being.

The following modalities have proven to be effective in treating clients with anxiety disorders and depression:

**Acupressure Massage:** often referred to as Chinese Massage or Tui Na, this modality provides your clients with a highly energizing and healing massage. Based on ancient Chinese medical principles, acupressure works by balancing the body's energy system while improving the musculoskeletal system simultaneously. Acupressure offers a rehabilitative approach that has been used in conjunction with relaxation massages to treat stress and anxiety. This modality also appeals to individuals whose anxiety presents itself in shyness or lack of self esteem, as it allows them to remain fully clothed and seated throughout the treatment.



The unique advantage that acupressure offers you as the therapist is the ability to treat the entire body with a systematic approach, moving along your client's acupressure points and energy channels (called meridians) in a logical and consistent way. Acupressure massage involves techniques which can stimulate the parasympathetic nerve that will result in a calming effect on body systems.

**Trigger Point Therapy:** Trigger points can be a very deceptive source of pain. A hyperirritable spot that develops in a taut band of muscle fiber, trigger points can cause radiating pain that has been linked to anxiety and depression. Clients will often complain of a muscle area that feels very tight but weak at the same time, which is your first indication as a therapist that trigger points may be the culprit. Pain and other symptoms often develop at insertion points but may be felt in distant areas of the body. Working in a

gentle but deliberate manner, knotted muscles can slowly be stretched back to their normal length. Many clients report immediate relief from this modality as it breaks the chemical and neurological cycle that causes pain, anxiety, and related problems.



**Swedish Massage:** In addition to loosening and calming a tired, aching body that is so commonly found in people with depression, a therapeutic massage can also ease mental tension and promote deep relaxation. The long, gliding strokes of effleurage and deep

tissue techniques that Swedish Massage employs can help your clients to experience a number of positive changes. Swedish relaxation techniques can help people with anxiety and depression to cope with stress-aggravated conditions, to feel more centered and to let go of stress and negative emotions. It often results in a deep sense of satisfaction, calmness and well-being, feelings that are hard to achieve by any other means! Makes sure you remind your depressed and anxious clients to take nice deep and slow breaths throughout the massage.

**Therapeutic Grade Essential Oils:** When pure, therapeutic-grade essential oils are used clinically, they exhibit significant anti-inflammatory and endocrine balancing effects. They have a profound influence on the central nervous system, which then helps to reduce or eliminate pain, change physiology in the body and affect brain and mood function. Being a massage therapist, you already understand the powerful effect that a healing touch

can have on a person. Soothing achy muscles and allowing a person the freedom to relax can have significant healing abilities. **When pure, therapeutic grade essential oils are combined with massage, the healing session is intensified and oftentimes the client will report a sense of euphoria.**

Clinical research performed at Duke University reports that certain scents promote relaxation, reduce stress and alleviate depression. Inhaling essential oils has been shown to stimulate the secretion of antibodies,



neurotransmitters in the brain (like serotonin), endorphins, hormones and enzymes. Certain oils like Lemon, Frankincense and Lavender can induce feelings of wellness. Make sure you always use pure, unadulterated oils; not synthetic oils that are typically sold in health food stores and grocery stores.

### **Precautions for Working with a Depressed Client**

As a professional massage therapist, it's important to learn to recognize the signs of clinical depression. If you observe that a depressed client is not seeking adequate support from their physician or counselor, a referral may be prudent. Massage can be an effective therapy to ease the symptoms of depression; however, it should never be considered a replacement for carefully managed care by the appropriate healthcare personnel. So be sure to refer them to someone if you feel like they need some medical attention.

As an integrative health care strategy, massage has been proven to have excellent therapeutic value in treating anxiety, stress and depression. Keeping in mind the warnings mentioned above, you will also be able to find deep satisfaction in helping your clients to overcome a debilitating mental and physical illness.





**CHAPTER 7 – PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER –**  
**SHARING THIS KNOWLEDGE WITH YOUR CLIENTS**  
**AND OTHER PEOPLE YOU MEET**



Achieving positive outcomes for your clients with chronic illnesses that we've discussed in this course may be much simpler than many practitioners realize. During your massage therapy sessions, rather than focusing solely on the pain (or any other complaint) your client experiences and how to treat it, endeavor to have a positive mindset by visualizing your clients as they will look and feel when they have achieved their health and wellness goals. Doing this will help you to concentrate on the therapeutic value of the massage you are giving, rather than focusing all of your energy and attention on only one

aspect of a disease or symptom. As many experienced practitioners will tell you, your outlook can be one of the most influential parts of your client's healing process.

## Let Your Clients Know About Your Professional Standing as a Licensed Massage Therapist

With massage therapy on the rise as an Integrative form of medicine, you will want to make sure that your clients are aware of the advantages of seeing a licensed massage therapist to ensure their safety and to achieve the maximum benefit from their treatments. Remember that you will need to display your license in a visible spot where you practice.

E. Houston LeBrun, former president of the American Massage Therapy Association noted: “As massage becomes more mainstream, consumers are becoming concerned about a massage therapist’s credentials, and they should be.” Many massage therapists have found it useful to provide a “Frequently Asked Questions” handout at their first session with a new client. You should include applicable information about your background, education and other licensing you may hold, which will help to put your client at ease. Here are some sample questions you might include in a FAQ handout or on your website:

- Are you a Licensed Massage Therapist...how long have you been practicing?
- What should I expect during a massage session?
- What should I wear during a massage session?
- How long will the session last and how much is it?
- Do you offer different types of massage (hot stone, deep tissue, etc.) and is there a difference in pricing? etc.)
- What happens if I fall asleep during the massage?
- Are there any health issues that make massage contraindicated?
- How will I feel after the massage?
- Do I need to do anything special after the massage session?
- How soon after one massage, can I book an appointment to have another massage?
- Do you use pure essential oils during the massage session?

What kind of lotion do you use? Or do you use a plant-based oil? Will it get all over my clothes and stain them?  
What happens if I can't make it to my appointment...What is your cancellation policy?  
What kind of pressure or massage techniques do you use? Will the massage be painful?  
What kind(s) of payment do you accept for the massage?  
Do you accept and file insurance on my behalf?



The British Medical Journal recently advised people that in order to protect themselves from unprofessional behavior “patients should ensure that practitioners are registered with an appropriate regulatory body.” If a client inquires about your qualifications, be sure to respond positively and professionally and direct them to your license which should be displayed proudly and prominently.

### Using This Knowledge in Your Professional Practice



No doubt you have already been creating a mental list of individuals you already work on who could benefit from the specific massage styles described in the preceding chapters. This course has outlined appropriate courses of massage treatment that can be used for some of the most prevalent diseases we face in our country, so you may even be thinking of a close friend or family member who has been touched by serious illness.

Not only can you use this information to help your existing clients, but keep in mind that what you have learned can **help you to attract and retain new**



**clients.** We all know someone, or we know someone who knows someone, who is dealing with one of the illnesses mentioned. An increasing number of physicians are willing to refer their patients to licensed massage therapists, especially to those who are experienced in treating people with

cancer, heart disease, fibromyalgia and pain disorders, depression or diabetes. Don't be afraid or intimidated to reach out and contact a specialized physician (like a Rheumatologist who specializes in dealing with patients that have chronic pain or an Oncologist who deals with cancer patients). Let them know that you specialize in massaging patients with chronic pain or cancer and that you're taking referrals. They can often be a GREAT resource of new clients for you. Be prepared to show adequate training and licensing when dealing with medical personnel; you should definitely receive hands-on instruction and certification when dealing with Oncology Massage.

Whether you choose to specialize in one area (for example, some massage therapists only work on cancer patients) or to address all of these illnesses, be committed to career long learning. As researchers improve our understanding of serious diseases, by staying informed, we as massage therapists can improve our ability to treat them.

If you are given the opportunity to treat a client with one of these illnesses, try not to be so hesitant or fearful that you are tempted to turn them away. When you receive a call from a cancer or heart disease patient, remember that you can refer back to this text to refresh your memory and create an appropriate treatment plan. Don't forget to ask questions to fully understand the person's state of health and if possible, request a consult with their doctor or specialist. Explaining to your clients your desire to understand all aspects of their illness will only help to foster their trust in you as a licensed therapist.

As you continue to add to your skill and knowledge base throughout your career, consider any learning opportunities that are open to you – in the form of seminars, workshops and the resources and books that can be added to your professional library for reference. Taking these steps is a worthwhile effort – it will help you to feel more satisfied and confident in your role and it will help you to become a better massage therapist, so your clients will benefit too!





In summary, I hope you now have an appreciation for working with clients that may be suffering from a debilitating illness. There is nothing to be afraid of and there are many benefits for your clients by having therapeutic massage. We all are involved in the natural healing field to help other people and to promote health in a natural environment. Educating people about the benefits of massage therapy be used in conjunction with a debilitating illness can enhance their wellbeing and enlighten them as to integrative and natural healing methodologies available to them.



**THANK YOU for taking this e-book class. I hope you found this e-book class to be informative and helpful.**

**I am available to offer support to you, so please don't hesitate to get in contact with me if you have any questions!**



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1. [Diana W. Guthrie](#), PhD, FAAN, CDE and
2. [Maureen Gamble](#), BSN, MA, CHTP/I, CCAP, RM

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