

Seven Things You Must Know Before Getting a Massage

Introduction

Life is stressful!

Work, school, kids, friends, in-laws, house maintenance, groceries, investments, debts... there are SO many things on our minds, it's amazing that we even function.

Everyone knows that stress is bad for our health, right? Doctors have been telling us this for years, so we always need to be on the lookout for ways to help relieve stress.

Exercise is one good way. Meditation helps too, along with getting a little extra sleep or reading (happy!) fiction books.

But over the years, massage therapy has proven to be one of the most effective ways to reduce stress. It helps you feel relaxed, soothes sore muscles, and relieves tension headaches. Research has even indicated that it might help boost your immune system!

The thing is- you don't want just *anybody* doing your massage therapy. You want someone who has experience, knows what they're doing and has a good reputation, right?

This report will help ensure that you get the therapy you need. By the end of this report, you'll know how to pick the right therapist for your needs, the multiple benefits of massage therapy, how to make sure it's done safely, and a whole lot more!

Because safety is a major concern, let's start there.

How Can I Be Sure My Massage is Done Correctly and Safely?

Let's face it- there's some associated risk to just about everything in this world. Driving a car has lots of risks. Playing a sport like basketball or football induces risk.

Even staying in a bed too long or playing video games for long periods of time have risks!

But even though massage therapy does have a few risks, there are some things you can do to mitigate these risks:

- **Only get Swedish massages.** Studies have shown that most injuries caused during massage therapy are from techniques that aren't Swedish in nature. These often involve excessive physical force or devices that just aren't necessary for a good massage.
- **Go to a professional.** Some massage centers are flat-out sketchy. They tend to cater to certain crowds and use amateur masseuses. If it seems to be a tiny hole-in-the-wall place and they haven't been in business for very long, don't go there! You want to see a professional who has been properly trained and certified.
- **Massages shouldn't hurt.** If you experience a lot of pain during your massage, something is wrong. Your massage should help alleviate some of your aches and pains- not make them worse. Granted, rubbing a sore or tight muscle won't be uncomfortable, but you shouldn't feel any kind of sharp or intense pain.
- **Don't mix blood thinners with massage.** If you have a bleeding disorder, low blood platelet counts, or if you're taking a blood-thinning medication, don't get a vigorous massage.
- **Injuries are off-limits.** Broken bones, infections, scabs, blood clots, weak bones, and any other kind of injured area of the body shouldn't be massaged.
- **Pregnant women should be very careful.** Even though you still may be able to get a massage, check with your primary care manager before you sign up for massage therapy. Depending on your specific condition, they may tell you to wait until a few weeks after you deliver your child.

In general, massage is a very safe practice. By keeping these things in mind, you'll be doing everything you can to avoid an unsafe experience.

How Do I Choose the Right Massage Therapist for My Needs?

As mentioned earlier, you want to see a professional massage therapist. Finding a random massage parlor isn't exactly the best way to go, so let's talk about how to find the right therapist for you.

There are 3 main places to go- your doctor, friends and family, and the Internet.

Doctor Referrals

Your doctor knows your condition better than anyone. If you're recovering from an injury, trying to lower your stress levels or just want a higher quality of life, your doctor should know that.

This knowledge allows your doctor to know what kind of therapy you need. They can then refer you to some massage therapists they personally know, like and trust.

Just as you may expect, doctors have a huge network of health professionals. They meet hundreds of nurses, therapists, surgeons and technicians over the years. This network allows them to easily make referrals and help them determine the best solutions for their patients.

If your doctor can't make a good recommendation, or you just don't want to talk to your doctor about this, you can talk to friends and family.

Recommendations from Loved Ones

Word-of-mouth advertising has always been the most effective method. When you hear good things from someone that you care for, you're MUCH more likely to try out that service or product, right? That's why asking your family and friends for a referral can be so useful.

Just keep in mind that some people may not have the best judgment. If they are biased for some reason or if they just don't make the greatest decisions in life, take their recommendation with a grain of salt!

Another thing to keep in mind is that the massage therapy your friend or family member required may be different than your own. If you need help with a medical condition but they just wanted to relax, their recommendation won't be as valid.

The Internet

The Internet is the world's greatest tool for researching information. A simple search on Google.com can pull up dozens of massage therapy centers in your local area. Many of these centers will probably have customer reviews on Google, allowing you to see what people thought of the center.

Another way to go more in-depth with your search is a review website like Angie's List. You have to pay a fee to become a member, but members are allowed to see the tens of thousands of reviews from other members. This might be the best way to see what unbiased people *really* think of a local company.

Or... Use All Three!

Don't feel like you have to just use one method or another. Talk to multiple people, visit a few websites, and then make your decision.

How Can I Make Sure I'm Dealing with a Qualified Massage Therapist?

Not all massage therapists are the same, as we've already discussed. Finding a good one comes from doing your research, which (unfortunately) takes a bit of time.

This section will help you determine what to look for in a qualified massage therapist. Typically, there are 2 things to watch for:

- 1) State License
- 2) Board Certifications

State licenses are not required in all states. However, right now there are 39 states that require you to be properly licensed in that state to practice massage therapy. As you might expect, these are some of the most populated states in the US, so you are most likely in one of those states.

When you start talking to massage therapists, ask if they're fully licensed to practice in your state. The answer should definitely be "yes" if you've been referred to them or if they've been around for a while, but it doesn't hurt to ask.

Board certifications typically come from the NCBTME- the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodyworks. This is, as the name implies, the primary national board that gives massage therapist their proper certifications to practice.

Note that even though a massage therapist is certified once, they should also continuously be learning about their trade. The NCBTME strongly recommends continuous education after the person is first certified.

What does this mean for you? For one thing, you can ask if potential therapists been certified by the NCBTME. Secondly, it means you can ask what kinds of classes or continuous education courses the person has taken to keep improving their craft.

Note that there are actually 2 types of certifications that NCBTME offers- the NCETMB and the NCETM. Either of these is fine, although a therapist with the NCETMB is slightly higher qualified.

Something else to keep in mind is that many reputable massage therapists will be part of their state's Board of Massage Therapy. When you call any potential therapist, ask if they're a part of your state's board and how long they've been a member.

What Types of Massage Should I Consider?

Depending on who you ask, someone may tell you there's anywhere from 3 to hundreds of types of massage to choose from! This can be overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be that complicated.

In general, there are 10 main types of massage. Here's that list, along with a short description of each.

Swedish massages are definitely the most common. It consists of using very long strokes on layers of muscle. Kneading and circular movements are also used, and usually a massage oil or lotion is also used to help relax the muscles. This is the type most recommended for people new to massage therapy.

Hot stone massages is where the therapist places very warm, smooth stones on certain areas of the body. The heat helps loosen tight muscles. Depending on the therapist, they may choose to push down on the stones to apply gentle pressure. The warm helps you relax, and this type of massage is gentler than the more common Swedish massages.

Shiatsu uses finger pressure in the acupuncture meridians of the body. Each point is held from 2-8 seconds, improving the flow of your body's energy. Shiatsu is very relaxing, and people are generally surprised at how good they feel afterwards.

Reflexology is sometimes just called a foot massage, although it's much more than that. The idea is that you can affect the organs and systems throughout your body simply by applying pressure to certain parts of the foot. Reflexology is best for someone who stands on their feet all day.

Sport massages are typically used by athletes. The idea isn't as much to help the person relax, but instead to improve flexibility, treat injury and improve performance. Strokes are faster than those of a Swedish massage and stretching is also used.

Back massages are typically for people who have sore backs but *not* back injuries. Patients who like these massages are typically those who have poor posture from sitting in a chair at work or school all day.

Deep tissue massages are slower, stronger strokes and friction techniques to work across the grain of the muscle. This is usually used for people with extremely painful or tight muscles or those recovering from an injury. If you have extremely poor posture, deep tissue massages are a good option. Just keep in mind that most people are sore for 1-2 days afterwards!

Aromatherapy uses scented oils to help address specific needs. For example, a therapist may choose a relaxing oil for a patient who is stressed, but an energizing oil for someone who feels lethargic. This is the best massage therapy if you feel strong emotions such as stress or depression.

Thai massages are similar to shiatsu, except they also use compression and stretching methods. Instead of just lying on a table, the therapist has you perform a sequence of postures. Some people have said it's like yoga without doing any work! Thai massages are more energizing than almost every other method.

Finally, **pregnancy massages** are becoming more common every year. The benefits include helping the expectant mother reduce stress, relieve aches, lower anxiety and decrease swelling.

What are the Benefits of a Massage?

We've already discussed a few of the benefits of massage therapy. Let's introduce a few more, and talk more about the ones already discussed.

Manage Stress and Anxiety

The most important benefit of a good massage is its ability to help you forget about your worries. You're able to just relax and let those worries disappear while you can just take a few minutes to enjoy yourself.

A massage isn't just something to do for health or social reasons- it's a present to yourself!

Relieve Pain

Most American adults experience regular pain in some shape or form. For some, it's arthritis. Others have a bad back that aches constantly. Maybe you have tension headaches all the time.

Massage therapy can help relieve these pains and more. By smoothing out tight muscles and helping your blood flow better, you can greatly reduce and sometimes eliminate these pains.

Got Sleep?

Western societies don't sleep enough. Most Americans average about 5-6 hours of sleep a night, even though doctors recommend getting 8-9 hours.

The thing is, just going to bed earlier may not help you get more sleep. Instead, you should do certain things (like get a massage) to help you fall asleep faster and improve your sleep quality.

Tired of Getting Sick?

Without a strong immune system you're going to get sick all of the time. Luckily, studies have shown that massage therapy can temporarily improve your immune system.

This isn't saying that you'll never get sick. Instead, it's just saying that you're less likely to get sick with a regular massage. Not a bad reason to treat yourself, huh?

Improve Alertness

Many of us live in a fog. We use stimulants like coffee or energy drinks to keep us awake throughout the day. Massage is a healthier, better solution! It can help you feel more alert because it stimulates blood flow throughout the body, including the brain.

Healthy Skin

Your blood is the nutrient highway for your body, right? So it makes sense that by helping blood flow to certain areas, those areas will get more of the nutrients they need.

One critical part of our bodies that often gets mistreated is the face. Sure, we might shave it or put make up on it, but do you ever do anything to improve its overall health? Simply rubbing it, as well as your scalp, for a few minutes each day will help your skin glow and be healthier.

Ease Treatment

Chances are high that you've either had extensive medical treatment for a serious condition or that you know someone who has. If so, you know that it can be extremely painful physically, emotionally and mentally for the patient. Massage therapy can help by helping the person relax and relieve physical pain.

Are There Any Dangers or Risks I Should be Aware of?

For the most part, massage therapy is a very safe procedure. Unless you are having an exotic or very intense massage technique performed, there are very few risks to worry about.

That said, there are a few things to keep in mind before you go in:

- **Do you have a history of heart disease?** Blood clots are the nasty little things that cause heart attacks and strokes. If you have a blood clot, massage therapy can actually cause that clot to loosen and travel to other parts of the body.
- **Nerve damage may occur.** Certain techniques including deep tissue massage can actually cause nerve damage. This is most common in less experienced masseuses, so having a more experienced therapist will prevent this from occurring.
- **Skin conditions can spread.** If you have a skin condition such as warts, a therapist may accidentally cause the condition to spread from one part of the body to another.
- **General discomfort.** Even though massage therapy can help someone recovering from treatments, it can also cause them more pain and grief if done incorrectly. Also, keep in mind that some things such as first or second degree burns will always be painful to the touch until they heal.
- **Fractures can worsen.** If a bone has recently been broken and is healing, do NOT have that area massaged. It can actually slow down the healing or worse, un-do healing that has already occurred. Likewise, if you have osteoporosis, consider only having a very light massage performed- deeper massages have the chance to fracture your bones.
- **Allergic reactions.** Some massage techniques such as aromatherapy use oils and lotions. Ask the therapist what kinds of oils they will use, especially if you have an allergy to certain things like lavender (a common massage oil).

Again, massage therapy is very safe. Even though some people have been negatively impacted by this kind of treatment, the vast majority of patients find massages beneficial.

Other Important Questions to Ask Before Having a Massage

Here is a list of questions to ask yourself and your potential massage therapist. Feel free to add any more that you can think of, but this will get you started.

Ask Yourself...

- What do you want to get out of the massage?
- What is your available budget?
- How much time do you have available for the treatment(s)?
- Is there someone who can go with you?
- Do you have conditions, such as osteoporosis or a history of heart disease, which may increase risks during the therapy?
- Do you know anyone who has had successful massage therapy?
- How far are you able to drive for therapy?

Ask Potential Therapists...

- How long have you been in business?
- Are you licensed in this state?
- Do you have a certification from the NCBTMB?
- Do you have referrals I can talk to about your service?
- What kinds of therapy do you offer?
- How long does each session take?
- Can I get a package discount if I sign up for multiple sessions at a time?
- Can I get a group discount?
- Have you ever had complaints filed against you with the BBB?

That should get you started!

Conclusion

We're a little biased, but we believe massage therapy is a beautiful, beautiful thing. It helps people reduce stress levels, experience less pain and just feel happier overall.

Going out for a massage is a great social event that also lets you get out of the house and improve your health. What else could you ask for?