

What is Massage Therapy?

The term “massage therapy” encompasses many different massage techniques. In general, massage therapists press, rub, and otherwise manipulate the muscles and other soft tissues of the body. They most often use their hands and fingers, but may use their forearms or elbows.

Massage therapy has a long history in cultures around the world. Today, people use many different types of massage therapy for a variety of health-related purposes. According to the 2007 National Health Interview Survey, an estimated 18 million U.S. adults and 700,000 children received massage therapy.

What type of education does a massage therapist receive? Licensed massage therapists must meet the educational requirements of the jurisdiction (state, county, city) in which they practice. The requirements vary from one jurisdiction to another. Forty-four states, including the ones in which CHP does business, and the District of Columbia have licensure requirements for the practice of massage. Most states require at least 500 hours and up to 1,000 of instruction in supervised, in-class initial massage therapy training, which must include the study of anatomy and physiology, the theory and practice of massage therapy, and elective subjects.

What kind of license does my massage therapist have and what do they have to do to maintain it? Requirements for obtaining and maintaining a license vary by jurisdiction, but most often involve proof of education and continuing education, demonstration of professionalism, and a background check. A summary of state massage therapy licensing laws is available [here](#).

What can I expect at my first visit? A quality massage therapist will conduct an intake interview to determine what your goals are in seeking massage therapy. For example, they might ask if you need help with a specific condition or injury or if massage going to be a part of your wellness program. The therapist will also determine if you have any conditions that would be of concern for massage. Expect the massage therapist to clearly explain the procedures, assess your comfort with removing clothing and provide you with a safe and private environment for massage.

How long will I need to continue seeing my massage therapist? The length and frequency of your massage therapy treatment program will depend on your goals for receiving massage therapy. Specific injuries or conditions may require a series of massage sessions over a number of weeks. Wellness or maintenance therapy may be at intervals of weeks to months apart. You and your therapist should collaborate on a treatment plan that is right for you.

What kinds of conditions does a massage therapist treat? Massage therapy clients seek massage for a variety of reasons including recovery from acute injuries, stress reduction, pain management and general improvement in overall health. Surveys show that 90% of massage therapy clients report that massage can be effective in relieving pain.

Recent clinical studies have demonstrated the safety and effectiveness of massage in a

number of conditions including:

- Cancer-related fatigue
- Low back pain
- Osteoarthritis of the knee
- Reducing post-operative pain
- Boosting the body's immune system functioning
- Decreasing the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome
- Lowering blood pressure
- Reducing headache frequency
- Easing alcohol withdrawal symptoms
- Decreasing pain in cancer patients

Does massage therapy have any adverse side effects? Massage therapy has very few serious risks if it is performed by a properly trained therapist and appropriate precautions are followed. The number of injuries reported is very small. Side effects of massage therapy may include temporary pain or discomfort, bruising, swelling, and a sensitivity or allergy to massage lotions or oils.

Some people may need to review precautions about massage therapy, including the following:

Vigorous massage should be avoided by people with bleeding disorders or low blood platelet counts, and by people taking blood-thinning medications such as warfarin.

Massage should not be done in any area of the body with blood clots, fractures, open or healing wounds, skin infections, or weakened bones (such as from osteoporosis or cancer), or where there has been a recent surgery.

Although massage therapy appears to be generally safe for cancer patients, they should consult their oncologist before having a massage that involves deep or intense pressure. Any direct pressure over a tumor usually is discouraged. Cancer patients should discuss any concerns about massage therapy with their oncologist.

Pregnant women should consult their health care provider before using massage therapy.

Where can I learn more about massage therapy? We have included links to useful information below:

www.amtamassage.org - American Massage Therapy Association nccam.nih.gov - National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, a division of the National Institutes of Health