



Massage therapy is one treatment commonly used to help alleviate pain, relieve stress, relax tight muscles, improve circulation and digestion, and rehabilitate bodily systems. This therapy is widely considered a 'complementary' or 'alternative' therapy, to be used in conjunction with – not in place of – conventional medical therapies. Before beginning massage therapy, clients should speak to their general medical doctor, as there are certain circumstances under which massage therapy is not advised.

### The Benefits of Massage Therapy

- Increases blood flow/circulation
- Increases pulmonary function; promotes deep breathing
- Reduces heart rate
- Improves soreness/fatigue
- Lowers blood pressure
- Regulates mood
- Controls stress
- Assists in relaxation
- Reduces pain, bloating, gas and cramps
- Stimulates peristalsis; relieves constipation
- Stimulates the skin and sensory receptors
- Reduces swelling and inflammation
- Increases range of motion and flexibility
- Decreases joint stiffness
- Stimulates lymphatic system
- Decreases fibrous adhesions (from muscle injury or immobilization)
- Improves posture and muscle tone
- Reduces fluid retention and stimulates waste removal

### How Does Massage Therapy Work?

Massage therapy is a method of manually manipulating the body's soft tissues (connective tissues, joints, ligaments, muscles, organs, skin, and tendons). The practice has benefits both



physical and emotional, as it promoted relaxation, comfort and pain relief. Benefits can roughly be divided as follows:

- Physical: promotes relaxation of the muscles and joints, increases circulation, stretches atrophied muscles, improves range of motion and relieves pain
- Emotional: promotes a sense of well-being and temporary peace of mind
- Psychological: Decreases anxiety and can assist with depression symptoms and stress

There are hundreds of different [massage therapy types](#), each of which has a slightly different focus.

### Who Provides Massage Therapy?

Massage therapy is conducted by a licensed massage therapist. Massage therapists must have a licence, certification, or other formal credential as regulated within their individual state. One independent agency that accredits massage therapy schools and training programs is the [Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation](#) (COMTA). Students must have between 500-1,000 hours of training and education in anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, pathology, assessment and treatment planning, business practice, ethics, body mechanics, and massage technique in order to gain a certificate, diploma or degree.

Massage therapists are often also board certified by the [National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork](#) (NCBTMB). They can also join the [American Massage Therapy Association](#) (AMTA), an organized body of massage therapists that provides continuing and further education for massage therapists.

Common certification acronyms for massage therapists include:

- LMT (Licensed massage therapist)
- LMP (Licensed massage practitioner)
- CMT (Certified massage therapist)



- NCTM (Licensed to practice therapeutic massage through the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork)
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Licensed massage therapists can be found in a variety of professional settings, including chiropractors' offices, spas, health care facilities, occupational settings, retail centers, sports centers and physical therapy offices. Because of the wide variety of massage types, different ranges of results, and relative effectivenesses, clients should clarify how experienced their therapist is, how long sessions are, and prices prior to scheduling sessions.

For information about what you can expect from a massage therapy session, please see the following [expectation guide](#). Please note that massage therapists provide strictly manual manipulation of soft tissues – they do *not* provide other services, such as nutritional counseling, medication prescription, psychotherapy, psychological counseling, or cosmetology.

#### When Is Massage Therapy *Not* Recommended?

Note that there should be a *consultation with a medical professional* prior to undertaking massage therapy, because there are some health conditions that can make massage therapy inadvisable or more risky, including:

- Blood disorders and hypertension
- Injuries and open wounds
- Infections, skin disease and rashes
- Recent surgery
- Cancer (direct pressure around tumors not recommended; massage not recommended after chemotherapy or radiation treatment; some forms of massage safe *if* coordinated with medical professional)
- Pregnancy (massage not recommended during first trimester or during high-risk)



pregnancies, wrist and ankle massage not recommended; certain modalities may increase risk of premature labor); massage therapists certified in pregnancy recommended

- Impaired perception and/or mental conditions
- Non-verbal individuals (require a system of communication in place to ensure massage is welcome and freely accepted)
- Certain other health conditions