

*Hello Gorgeous*  
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## What Is Massage Therapy?

Massage therapy is recognized as one of the oldest methods of healing, with references in medical texts nearly 4,000 years old. In fact, Hippocrates, known as the "father of medicine," referenced massage when he wrote, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.: "The physician must be acquainted with many things, and assuredly with *rubbing*."

In addition to "rubbing," massage therapy, often referred to as bodywork or somatic therapy, refers to the application of various techniques to the muscular structure and soft tissues of the body that include applying fixed or movable pressure, holding, vibration, rocking, friction, kneading and compression using primarily the hands, although massage therapists do use other areas of the body, such as the forearms, elbows or feet. All of the techniques are used for the benefit of the musculoskeletal, circulatory-lymphatic, nervous, and other systems of the body. In fact, massage therapy positively influences the overall health and well-being of the client:

## Physical and Mental Benefit

- relaxes the whole body
- loosens tight muscles
- relieves tired and aching muscles
- increases flexibility and range of motion
- diminishes chronic pain
- calms the nervous system
- lowers blood pressure
- lowers heart rate
- enhances skin tone
- assists in recovery from injuries and illness
- strengthens the immune system
- reduces tension headaches
- reduces mental stress
- improves concentration
- promotes restful sleep
- aids in mental relaxation

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Generally, massage is known to affect the circulation of blood and the flow of blood and lymph, reduce muscular tension or flaccidity, affect the nervous system through stimulation or sedation, and enhance tissue healing.

Massage therapy also has a number of documented clinical benefits. For example, massage can reduce anxiety, improve pulmonary function in young **asthma** patients, reduce psycho-emotional distress in persons suffering from chronic **inflammatory bowel disease**, increase weight and improve motor development in premature infants, and may enhance immune system functioning. Some medical conditions that massage therapy can help are: **allergies**, anxiety and stress, arthritis, asthma and **bronchitis**, **carpal tunnel syndrome** and other repetitive motion injuries, chronic and temporary pain, circulatory problems, **depression**, digestive disorders, tension **headache**, **insomnia**, myofascial pain, sports injuries, and temporomandibular joint dysfunction.

Massage therapy is the scientific manipulation of the soft tissues of the body for the purpose of normalizing those issues and consists of a group of manual techniques that include applying fixed or movable pressure, holding, and/or causing movement of or to the body. While massage therapy is applied primarily with the hands, sometimes the forearms or elbows are used. These techniques affect the muscular, skeletal, circulatory, lymphatic, nervous, and other systems of the body. The basic philosophy of massage therapy embraces the concept of *vis Medicatrix naturae*, which is aiding the ability of the body to heal itself, and is aimed at achieving or increasing health and well-being.

Touch is the fundamental medium of massage therapy. While massage can be described in terms of the type of techniques performed, touch is not used solely in a mechanistic way in massage therapy. One could look at a diagram or photo of a massage technique that depicts where to place one's hands and what direction the stroke should go, but this would not convey everything that is important for giving a good massage. Massage also has an artistic component.

Because massage usually involves applying touch with some degree of pressure and movement, the massage therapist must use touch with sensitivity in order to determine the optimal amount of pressure to use for each person. For example, using too much pressure may cause the body to tense up, while using too little may not have enough effect. Touch used with sensitivity also allows the massage therapist to receive useful information via his or her hands about the client's body, such as locating areas of muscle tension and other soft tissue problems. Because touch is also a form of communication, sensitive touch can convey a sense of caring—an essential element in the therapeutic relationship—to the person receiving massage.

In practice, many massage therapists use more than one technique or method in their work and sometimes combine several. Effective massage therapists ascertain each person's needs and then use the techniques that will meet those needs best.