

Massage Therapist



History

Massage has its roots in the far reaches of human history. Rubbing a sore muscle or stroking another person for comfort is a natural response. The first written records that refer to massage date back more than 4,000 years to China. In ancient Greece, Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, wrote, "The physician must be experienced in many things, but most assuredly in rubbing."

Massage comes from both Western and Eastern traditions. Western traditions date back to ancient Greece and Rome. Modern Western massage owes a great deal to the work of Peter Henrik Ling, a 19th-century educator and athlete from Sweden. His approach, which combined hands-on techniques with active movements, became known as Swedish Massage, probably the most common therapeutic massage modality in the West.

Eastern traditions can be traced back to the folk medicine of China and the Ayurvedic medicine of India. Shiatsu, acupressure, reflexology, and many other contemporary techniques have their roots in these sources.

The incorporation of massage into health care was fairly well-established in the 19th century, but those connections decreased through most of the 20th century. A growing body of clinical research on the efficacy and value of massage as part of integrated health care, as well as a rapid acceptance and adoption of use of massage in recent years, has fueled a renewed collaboration between massage therapists and other health professionals. Use of massage in the hospital setting has increased as well, and growth in the consumer acceptance of massage over the last 2 decades has been substantial.



Career Description

Leading professional massage associations have defined massage as systems of structured palpation or movement of the soft tissue of the body, including holding, causing movement, and/or applying pressure to the body. Massage therapy is a profession in which the practitioner applies manual techniques (by use of hand or body), and may apply adjunctive therapies, with the intention of positively affecting the health and well-being of the client.

An increasing body of research shows massage reduces heart rate, can help lower blood pressure, increases blood circulation and lymph flow, relaxes muscles, improves range of motion, and increases endorphins. Recent studies indicate massage enhances the functioning of the immune system. Although therapeutic massage does not increase muscle strength, it can stimulate weak, inactive muscles and, thus, partially compensate for the lack of exercise and inactivity resulting from illness or injury. It also can hasten and lead to a more complete recovery from exercise or injury.

Some of the most common types of massage are Swedish massage, deep-tissue massage, Shiatsu-acupressure, neuromuscular, trigger point, and sports massage. Massage therapy can be strenuous work at times. Practitioners must use correct body mechanics to prevent injury and fatigue. If the therapist travels to give massage, they transport either a massage table or massage chair and all supplies necessary to give a massage. The profession requires good listening skills and the ability to make clients comfortable

and relaxed. Massage therapists often adopt massage practice as a second or third career and many enjoy the freedom of part-time work and independent practice.

In addition to the actual massage, massage therapists market their practices, keep financial and client records, maintain supplies and equipment, educate their clients about massage and inform them of any physical irregularities they discover, and work with health insurance companies to receive fees. Practitioners take basic medical histories on clients and discuss with the client their current health. During massage, therapists pay close attention to how the client is responding and discuss levels of massage pressure with the client. They also must be aware of medical conditions that might contraindicate massage and advise clients when massage is not appropriate.



Employment Characteristics

Massage therapists work in many different environments. The vast majority work at least some of their hours in private practice, and many combine that practice with part-time work in hospitals, physician or chiropractor offices, nursing homes, pain clinics, resorts, cruise ships, shopping malls, airports, spas, and salons. Some travel to clients' homes or to business offices. Onsite chair massage has become a very popular form of massage because of its convenience of use in a variety of settings, such as corporate offices. Some therapists focus exclusively on massage for stress relief and relaxation, while others specialize in such modalities as pregnancy massage, massage to reduce lymphedema after cancer surgery, massage for pain relief, and sports massage, among other specialties. There has been a proliferation of massage modalities in recent years, and many therapists combine several to create unique offerings.



Salary

Earnings among massage therapists vary widely, depending on where the therapist practices, their level of experience, the number of client-contact hours, and their ability to establish and sustain an independent business. Responsibilities in addition to massage include practice management, billing, marketing, etc.

While government statistics place annual earnings for massage therapists at about \$30,000, these figures are based on an assumption therapists work strictly as employees, who keep strenuous year-round schedules of 40-hours weekly in client massage. More complete industry surveys reflecting prevalent part-time and private-practice models, however, show practitioners having an average that is closer to 15 client-contact hours weekly, earning them annual massage-related incomes between \$15,000 and \$19,000.

For more information, see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Employment Outlook

Projections from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that employment of massage therapists is expected to increase by 19% from 2008 to 2018, faster than the average for all occupations.



Educational Programs

Minimum entry-level standards for massage therapy training vary greatly, based on state or local requirements, professional association standards, or insurance requirements. State regulatory requirements for massage practice range from a minimum of 500 in-class hours at a recognized massage schools—the most prevalent standard—to 1,000 in-class hours of massage training in accredited massage programs.

Massage therapy training programs and schools can voluntarily seek accreditation from seven accrediting agencies recognized by the US Department of Education. Only 30% of state-approved massage therapy training programs have received such accreditation. The Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA) is one of these agencies and is the only agency dedicated solely to accreditation for massage therapy.

There are two major professional massage associations, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (the largest), and the American Massage Therapy Association. As a condition of membership, both require the completion of a minimum number of classroom hours and state licensing in states where licensing has been enacted.



Licensure

Currently, 41 states and Washington, DC, regulate massage therapy. Some states license massage therapists, while others have basic standards. Regulation of massage therapy by the states has increased in recent years, with 26 states having passed regulations between 1990 and 2008.

Entry Examination and Certification

Some states require passage of an exam before granting a license. In 2007, the Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards introduced the Massage and Bodywork Licensing Exam (MBLEx), which is designed to assess a massage therapist's readiness to practice safely and competently. Some states also accept for entry purposes, a passing score on the test component involved in securing voluntary professional certification from the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork or the American Organization for Bodywork Therapies of Asia.



Inquiries

Massage Careers, Organizational Memberships

Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

1271 Sugarbush Drive

Evergreen, CO 80439-9766

(800) 458-2267

E-mail: expectmore@abmp.com

www.abmp.com

American Massage Therapy Association

500 Davis Street, Suite 900

Evanston, IL 60201-4695

(847) 864-0123

E-mail: info@amtamassage.org

www.amtamassage.org

Entry Examination

Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards

7111 W 151st Street, Suite 356

Overland Park, KS 66223

(888) 703-7682

E-mail: info@fsmtb.org

www.fsmtb.org

Certification

National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork

8201 Greensboro Drive, Suite 300

McLean, VA 22102

(800) 296-0664 or (703) 610-9015

E-mail: info@ncbtmb.com

www.ncbtmb.com

Program Accreditation

Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation

1007 Church Street, Suite 302

Evanston, IL 60201

847 869-5039

E-mail: info@comta.org

www.comta.org