

How To Make The Most Of Your Massage Therapy Session

You have made a wonderful decision to have a professional massage. There are over 25 million Americans who seek professional massage and bodywork each year. Despite this statistic, massage is still not universally a common part of our contemporary cultural experience and many people feel uneasy about receiving their first massage. Here are some guidelines to help you feel at ease and to gain the greatest benefit from your massage therapy session.

- * Your therapist will ask you to fill out a confidential client form. Be sure to share any concerns or information you might have about health problems before the massage begins. Tell the therapist about areas of your body which are injured, tense or sore. The manner in which your body is massaged will be determined by the problem being treated. Also mention any medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, a heart problem, chronic headaches, varicose veins, fresh wounds, skin irritations or recent surgery.
- * You may be given a choice about music, lotion or scent preferences. Only a high quality fragrance free massage oil or lotion will be applied to reduce friction between hands and your skin. If at anytime during your massage you have changed your preference, speak up! If you do not like the music or it is distracting for you, ask for the music to be shut off or changed. You can even bring your own.
- * Do not eat a heavy meal or drink alcoholic beverages right before your massage is scheduled. It's best to allow at least 1½ hours after eating before receiving a massage.
- * Before the massage, a shower, if possible, is ideal. Hot water, especially steam, tends to loosen up the muscles and prepares the skin. Go to the restroom before your massage.
- * Turn off your cell phone while you are receiving your treatment.
- * The best way to receive a massage is completely unclothed. The more skin available to work with, the greater the benefit for you. The therapist is sensitive to the need for privacy and your body will be covered with a sheet or blanket during the massage with only the area being worked on uncovered at any given time. Breasts and genitals will never be exposed during the massage. If this arrangement is uncomfortable for you, you are welcome to wear underwear or a swimsuit. Your therapist will leave the room while you undress to your comfort level.
- * Let your therapist know before the massage if there are any places you don't want to be touched. The glutes (buttocks), abdomen and face are always optional.
- * While the best massages are those with limited conversation, be sure to ask questions or express concerns at any time during the massage. However, some clients may still need to talk for a while to "wind down". As much as possible, allow your conversation to relate to the massage. There is no need to feel obligated to "make conversation" just to be polite.
- * A great way to start a massage is with a couple of deep breaths. Imagine blowing away any concerns about the past or the future! Close your eyes and allow yourself to relax as completely as possible. Focus your attention on your breathing, which should be slow, deep and even. When the therapist is pushing down on muscle, let the air out of your lungs in time with the pressure. Breathe in as the therapist pulls back his or her pressure. When the therapist's hands locate areas of pain or tension in your body, consciously try to relax those areas. As you inhale softly and deeply visualize the breath flowing to the tense area and relaxing it. As you full exhale, visualize the tension leaving your body.
- * When your tissues are being touched and as you experience deeper levels of relaxation, memories and emotions may be triggered. If you suddenly feel sad, angry or joyful do not be alarmed. THIS IS NORMAL. The best way to let them go is to let them "flow". You can allow yourself to express these feelings by crying or laughing. Your therapist is there to provide a safe and accepting space for healing to take place on all levels. Your therapist will continue the massage or stop if you wish. At the very least, feel free to sigh with relaxation, hum with pleasure, or groan during a release.
- * Contrary to a common notion in our society about massage, it is an ancient and highly effective healing art and not a sexual service. As a completely natural reaction, the body might become aroused as you experience the pleasure of human touch and total relaxation. Understand that if and when this occurs it is usually a simple phase which passes in time, and it need not result in any undue stress or anxiety for client or therapist. However, sexual behavior during a massage is inappropriate and will result in, at the very least, termination of the session, for which payment is still due.
- * Your therapist may move your head, neck and limbs during the massage. Try to stay loose and let go, knowing that your therapist is there to fully support you. As the therapist moves the sheet to work on a part of your body, don't move for them or hold limbs up as they secure the sheet for the tension inhibits your relaxation. No need to be helpful. Simply receive. However, feel free to give your therapist feedback. Ask questions when you have them. Please speak up if you feel too cold or too hot, experience discomfort, or desire more or less pressure. Please feel free to speak up if anything the therapist does is too painful or ticklish, or uncomfortable in any way. While your therapist is watching your body for clues, the surest and easiest way to get what you need is to ask.
- * Many people fall asleep during a massage, which is indication the body and mind are releasing stress and tension. Your therapist will allow you to sleep and gently wake you when it is time to turn over or the massage is finished.
- * When the massage is over, the therapist will leave the room so you can get up slowly and carefully from the table and get dressed at your own pace. You may feel lightheaded. After leaving the session you may want to take a short walk before driving.
- * Toxins may get "stirred up" during the massage. Be sure to drink lots of water to help flush them out of your system.
- * Before your next massage begins, be sure to give your therapist feedback about how you felt after your last therapy. This helps your therapist with your needs.

I hope that your massage is both enjoyable and beneficial, and that this experience will be the beginning of a lifelong practice to help you achieve your true potential and enjoy the best possible health and relaxation.