

Lesson 20: Massage Preparation

OBJECTIVES OF THIS LESSON

- Describe how you can keep yourself safe and healthy as a therapist including posture, working positions, attitude and exercise;
- Describe the requirements for preparing the client for massage.

How can massage therapists protect and take care of themselves?

Massage is a very physical treatment. It can take a lot out of the therapist giving it.

The effects of the treatment depend on the physical energy of the therapist performing it. If the energy is depleted by health problems or limited by incorrect posture, then the treatment will be less effective.

Any therapist continuing to work without paying attention to correct posture will cause damage to their own body, both in the short and long term.

To protect themselves, massage therapists should pay attention to the following 4 areas:

- Posture
- Working positions
- Attitude
- Exercise



Each one of these factors contributes to the positive effects of treatments and prevents the therapist from harming themselves.

Posture

Good posture is necessary both for your own health and well-being and to maintain a quality and sustainable practice.

When consulting and working on the client the therapist should avoid:

- Tension in arms, neck, and shoulders
- Stiff, rigid legs and locked knees
- Stiff, inflexible wrists and hands
- Uneven distribution of weight in the legs
- Slouching or crossing the legs
- Repeating the same movements too often: varying the routines helps prevent repetitive strain injuries.

All the above can cause neck and back problems, muscle strain and repetitive strain injuries. Not only are they damaging, but they also affect the therapist's attitude, give a poor impression, and prevent the most effective treatment.

A balanced upright posture has many advantages:

- Enables the body to withstand fatigue,
- Eases nervous tension and increases mental alertness,
- Increases physical stress tolerance,
- Body becomes less susceptible to infections and illness and less prone to injury,
- Increases physical confidence and emotional balance.

Receiving body massage can help improve posture as it:

- Helps lengthen compressed joints,
- Helps to improve nutrients to soft tissues and joints,
- Helps loosen stiff joints and encourages movement where it is lacking,
- Helps maintain full joint mobility and good muscle tone.

Maintain correct posture during massage treatments:

- Keep the back straight but not rigid,
- Keep wrists and forearms as straight as possible without locking them,
- Keep legs slightly bent,
- Keep shoulders relaxed,
- It is common tendency to tense the shoulders, holding them close to the ears – practice rolling your shoulders forward and backward before each treatment,
- Move around the client instead of overreaching and risking muscle damage,
- Distribute the weight of the body evenly between both legs - many of us tend to rest on one leg, overworking it and weakening the other,
- Take regular breaks between (not during!) treatments,
- Invest in a height adjustable chair or couch for clients,
- Be aware of your own body, where tension is held and what causes strain. Awareness of one's body limits will help prevent overstretching it.

Remember – it is often the tiniest movements which cause the most damage.

Good posture enables the therapist to concentrate on the massage without worrying whether they will be able to perform the movements and limits the likelihood of acute or chronic injury.



Working Positions

Working positions are designed to protect the working therapist from muscle or joint strain as well as allowing maximum mobility and pressure for the treatment

The positions below are the recommended main positions for a full body massage.

Striding position

Stand with your body at an angle to the table, feet positioned as if striding forward in a lunge position. Maintain flexible knees and shift your body weight from the back leg into the front leg to get momentum to your stroke.

This position is used for long strokes, such as effleurage, along the length of the body, particularly across the back and the legs.

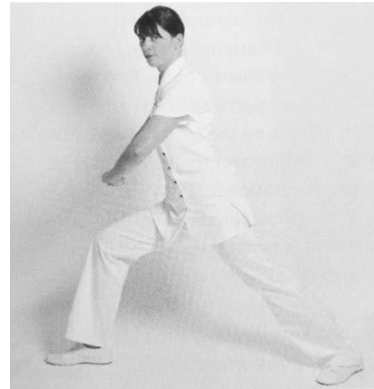
Side standing position

Feet should be wide apart and positioned at 45 degrees from the body. Keep knees soft and hips forward, with your rear tucked under. Forearms should be at right angles to the body and wrists flexible. Keep the neck straight and glance down at your client without bending your neck.

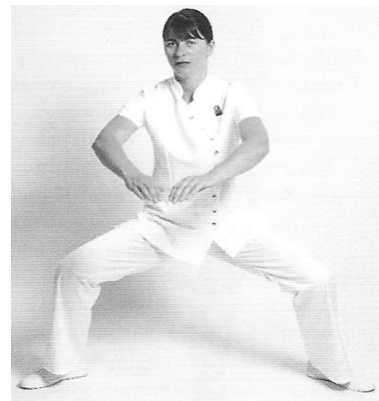
This position is used for short strokes such as kneading, wringing and percussion, rather than effleurage, when work is across the muscles or in a local area.

Attitude

Have you ever noticed that when you are in a good mood and you meet someone in a bad or negative mood, you often leave feeling less positive? This is because other people's moods and attitudes affect us. When giving a treatment a therapist's mood & attitude will affect their client.



Striding Position



Side Standing Position

A tense therapist will make the client tense.

A rushed therapist will make the client feel rushed.



For a massage to have the desired effect for the client, whether it's intended to be relaxing or energizing, the therapist will need to bring the right attitude to the treatment room.

In general, the therapist should feel centered and focused, secure and calm and able to concentrate on using their own physical or mental energy to work on and improve the physical or mental energy of the clients. Always begin a massage in a positive and caring frame of mind. Take time to relax and center yourself before you start the treatment. Once the treatment has started, encourage your client to relax by not engaging in too much conversation, merely reply to any questions and let them know you are listening.

To give a treatment you need to be quiet and calm. Put aside at least 10 minutes before each new client to free yourself from tension and mental preoccupation, so you can relax into the rhythm of the massage, which will enhance the treatment for your client and is less tiring for you.



Try these simple techniques to focus and prepare yourself:

Close your eyes and sit quietly for a few minutes.

Let go of any thoughts that may be worrying you or are cluttering your mind.

Concentrate on your breathing. Imagine all unnecessary tension flowing out of you each time you exhale.

Exercise and breathing

A massage therapist will need to take regular exercise to have the physical fitness and stamina to carry out the treatments. Exercise is one of the best ways to relax after work, to prevent the build-up of tension and stiffness from working in similar standing positions all day. Hands and wrist should also be exercised on a regular basis to keep them supple and flexible.

Breathing exercise can help with relaxation both during and between treatments. Throughout the massage the therapist should be aware of their breathing and that of the client. The therapist should encourage the clients to breathe deeply and evenly and should make sure their own breathing is calm, regular and matches the client's pace. This will enable both parties to relax and concentrate on the treatment. Yoga, meditation and t'ai chi are all exercises which include breathing techniques, while at the same time strengthening the body and mind. (Tucker, 2016)



Good news!

Therapists should try to receive regular massage treatment themselves.



Preparing Yourself – Therapist Presentation

The previous lesson considered elements of preparing yourself for giving massage treatments in terms of your attitude and physical wellbeing, but it is important to also consider the presentation of you, the therapist, when preparing to offer body massage.

Therapists should wear appropriate attire including comfortable and covered footwear. Massage therapy uniforms are typically single coloured, normally white, grey, black or blue but can range in colour. Clothing for massage should be comfortable and breathable, not too tight, but not so loose that it risks being too revealing when bending over. You should have more than one uniform so that they can be washed regularly to maintain hygiene standards.

Therapists should wear no jewellery when giving treatments other than a simple band ring (such as a single wedding band) and simple stud earring/s. Fingernails should be short, clean, and unvarnished. Hair should be worn away from the face/collar.

Task: Preparing yourself



Make a list of anything you think you might need to research further. Perhaps you want to consider purchasing some branded uniforms. Do some research.

Preparing the client for massage

Following your consultation and with informed consent to continue with a planned massage treatment, there are important steps to take before the client is ready for massage.

Ensure that the client undresses to their underwear. If the massage is only going to be covering their top half it is preferable for them still to remove lower-half clothing, however if they prefer to keep comfortable bottoms on, they can do.

Always protect the client's modesty by providing somewhere private to change. This may mean you leave the room and knock to re-enter. Give your client a dressing gown or towel to cover themselves between changing and laying on the couch.

The client should remove all jewellery, except for a wedding band or similar. Make sure you have somewhere safe and secure for the client to store their valuables during the treatment.

Remind client of the treatment plan and ensure they know whether they should position themselves prone or supine on the couch. Offer help to the client for getting on to the couch prior to treatment.

Ensure that the client is comfortable with the use of supports, e.g., under ankles, chest, forehead, knees, head.

Ensure all parts of the client are covered except the area being massaged. Your towel management routine will need to ensure that you can easily alter the areas covered and uncovered without causing interruption to the routine. For example, ensure that the towels

across the back form a T shape, with the towel tucked firmly into underwear so that the lower back can later be easily accessed.

Wipe the client's hands/feet before and after treatment using wet wipe cloths.

Don't forget to wash your hands before the treatments begins.

Before uncovering the client use cat paw technique from the feet to the shoulders to engage the client's body and physically prepare them for massage.