

Massage and... what is massage?

In a nutshell

Massage is a form of bodywork in which the intention is to improve the health and well being of the client through working on the muscles and associated soft tissues of the body.

The massage therapist has a variety of techniques at his or her disposal, which he or she applies to the client's body using a combination of fingers, hands, forearms and elbows (some types of massage even use feet!). The therapist will base the choice and application of these techniques on the needs of the client combined with the therapist's own knowledge and experience.

Origins of massage

At its most basic, think about what happens when you injure yourself; your instinct is to rub and hold the area to help reduce the pain. And imagine the relaxing and calming effects of being held by a loved one. We instinctively know that touch can have a healing effect and this is undoubtedly where massage originates.

Massage has been part of systems of healing in other parts of the world for thousands of years. In India massage forms a key part of Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine that has been in use for more than 5,000 years. Other examples include Chinese Tui Na and Zhi Ya massage, Japanese Anma and Shiatsu, Roman massage and Thai massage among many, many others.

What these all have in common is that they have been in use in healthcare long before western science and medicine emerged. Per Henrik Ling was the first person to apply scientific knowledge and approach to massage and it was in Stockholm, Sweden, that the first college was established in 1813 that offered this massage as part of the curriculum. This developed into what we now know as 'Swedish Massage', which is one of the most popular forms of massage in Britain.

Effects of massage

Massage therapy has wide ranging benefits. It can be highly effective in aiding relaxation and dealing with stress related issues, while relief of tension in the body can aid posture, help its various systems to work more efficiently and reduce pain. It can provide a boost when lacking energy, recovering from illness, or suffering various conditions such as arthritis or M.E. Additionally, it can help the body recover from physical activity or stresses and so can be highly beneficial for office workers and athletes alike. And let's not forget - with that 'feel good' factor it can also simply be a seriously indulgent treat!

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