

## Frequently Asked Questions

### •What is massage therapy?

Massage therapy spans a wide variety of therapeutic approaches, working to improve an individual's health and well-being through the hands-on manipulation of muscles and other soft tissues of the body.

### •What are the key benefits of massage therapy?

**Physical** — Massage therapy is designed to stretch and loosen muscles, improve blood flow and the movement of lymph throughout the body, facilitate the removal of metabolic wastes resulting from exercise or inactivity, and increase the flow of oxygen and nutrients to cells and tissue. In addition, massage stimulates the release of endorphins — the body's natural painkiller — into the brain and nervous system.

**Mental** — Massage therapy provides a relaxed state of alertness, reduces mental stress and enhances capacity for calm thinking and creativity.

**Emotional** — Massage therapy satisfies the need for caring and nurturing touch, creates a feeling of well-being and reduces anxiety levels.

### •Who can benefit from massage therapy?

People throughout the life cycle — from the very young and very old to those in between — all find that a professional massage can have special applications suited for their needs.

### •What is the origin of therapeutic massage?

Therapeutic massage methods used today have both Eastern and Western origins. The first written records of massage date back 3,000 years to early Chinese folk medicine and ancient Ayurvedic medicine of India. Shiatsu, acupressure and reflexology spring from these Eastern sources, as do other contemporary methods.

Western civilizations were introduced to therapeutic massage by Greek and Roman physicians. Modern Western massage is credited primarily to Peter Henrik Ling, a 19th century Swedish athlete. His approach, which combines hands-on techniques with active and passive movements, became known as Swedish massage — still one of the most commonly used methods in the Western world.

### •What do research studies say about massage therapy?

Myriad research studies confirm that massage therapy provides physical, mental and emotional benefits at all stages of life.

### •How is massage therapy regarded by the medical community?

The results of a survey, conducted between November 2000 and February 2001 in Washington State, indicate strong recognition on the part of medical clinicians that massage therapy is effective. 1

The American Medical Association published a report in September 2000 that said two-thirds of the nation's medical schools teach about herbal therapy, acupuncture, massage or other alternative medicine. 2

### •Is massage therapy a luxury?

This is a perception that is rapidly changing as massage becomes increasingly accepted as a natural part of a healthy lifestyle. In fact, according to one media characterization, "massage is to the human body what a tune-up is to a car. It provides a physical boost to the weary, sore and stressed."

### •How many massage therapists are there in the U.S.?

The number of massage therapists is estimated at between 160,000 and 220,000, including part-time and full-time practitioners, and students.

*“An increasing body of clinical research confirms that massage reduces heart rate, lowers blood pressure, increases blood circulation and lymph flow, relaxes muscles, improves range of motion, boosts the immune system, and increases endorphins...”*

— Elliot Greene

### •Where do massage therapists practice?

-Massage therapists offer their services in a wide variety of settings, including:

- \* private practice clinics and offices
- \* physicians' offices and wellness facilities
- \* chiropractors' offices and rehabilitation clinics
- \* salons, spas, resorts and cruise ships
- \* health clubs and fitness centers
- \* nursing homes and hospitals
- \* on-site in the workplace
- \* in client's homes

# Equilibrium<sup>3</sup> Massage Therapy

## •How can I find a qualified massage therapist?

Personal referrals from friends or healthcare providers familiar with massage are great ways to find a massage therapist.

When calling therapists, ask what services they offer, inquire about their training/licensing and/or National Certification, and ask for references. Personality fit also is important in choosing a massage therapist, as is trust, and feeling confident in and comfortable with the massage therapist. Massage therapists use a variety of techniques. You may need to try a few different practitioners to find one that fits your needs.

COMTA-accredited massage training programs require a stringent course of study, including at least 500 hours of classroom instruction in anatomy and physiology, massage and technique, relationships with clients, plus related subjects.

AMTA's Find a Massage Therapist<sup>SM</sup> national locator service helps consumers and healthcare professionals find qualified massage therapists in their area. This free service is available via the Web at [www.amtamassage.org](http://www.amtamassage.org) and toll-free at 888-843-2682. People in the United States seeking a massage therapist can search AMTA's Professional Members for a practitioner nearby.

Founded in 1943, the American Massage Therapy Association has more than 46,000 members in 30 countries. The Association also offers consumer education materials about the benefits of massage.

AMTA has strict membership requirements and also has a Code of Ethics and practice standards that promote the highest quality assurance in the profession.

## •What credentials should a qualified massage therapist have?

Check to see if the massage therapist is licensed to practice. Thirty states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation to regulate the massage therapy profession. If practicing in those states, the massage therapist should hold a current license. Local governments may also regulate massage therapists. In such areas, make sure your massage therapist is licensed in your area.

A massage therapist should be able to document professional training in massage therapy at a massage training institution such as those accredited by the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA) or is a member of the AMTA Council of Schools. He/she should be a member of a professional association with high standards for membership and/or be Nationally Certified in Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCTMB).

Professional membership is limited to massage therapists who have demonstrated a level of skill and expertise

through testing and/or education. In addition, all AMTA-member therapists must agree to abide by the AMTA Code of Ethics.

## •What is fueling the growth of massage therapy?

Doctors increasingly recommend it for stress relief and as part of treatment programs for chronic pain and other medical conditions. Businesses have begun to recognize its potential to boost worker productivity and morale, and decrease absenteeism. Public interest in complementary and alternative therapies has led many consumers to try massage, discovering its benefits for their health.

The health and fitness movement also is a driving force behind the growth of the massage therapy profession, as are America's growing emphasis on wellness, and the aging of the "Baby-boomer" population. Athletes and performing artists praise massage for the way it helps to improve performance and enhance recovery.

## •When might the use of massage therapy be inappropriate?

If you suffer from certain circulatory ailments (such as phlebitis), infectious diseases, certain forms of cancer, cardiac problems, certain skin conditions, or any inflamed or infected tissues, be sure to consult your physician before initiating any massage program. A trained and experienced massage therapist will also be able to tell you when massage is not indicated.

## •Does the consumer have any responsibilities during the massage?

A person receiving a massage should give the therapist accurate health information, allergies to oils, etc. and always report discomfort of any kind — whether it's from the massage itself or due to room temperature, volume of music, or other distractions.

1 Weeks, John, "Post-Legislative Mandate: Two-thirds of Group Health Clinician Respondents View CAM as Effective," The Integrator for the Business of Alternative Medicine, p. 7 (April 2001).

2 Barzansky, et. al., "Educational Programs in U.S. Medical Schools, 1999-2000," Journal of the American Medical Association 284(9): 1114-1120 (September 6, 2000).

3 "The Landmark Report on Public Perceptions of Alternative Care" (November 1997).

5 "Public Attitudes Towards Massage Study," Caravan, Opinion Research Corporation International (July 2000).