

# Ethics: Contraindications to Massage Home Study Course

3 CE Hours  
Text and Online Study Guide

Presented by the:  
*Center for Massage Therapy Continuing Education*

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## Center for Massage Therapy Continuing Education

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It is the responsibility of the practitioner to determine the appropriateness of the principles presented in terms within the scope of practice. This information is in no way meant to diagnose or treat medical conditions.

## **Instructions for the Ethics: Contraindications to Massage home study course**

Thank you for investing in the Ethics: Contraindications to Massage home study course, a 3 CE hour course designed to further your knowledge in the practice of massage by informing you of potential contraindications client's may possess to Swedish massage.

This guide will contain all of the instructions you will need to complete this course. This is a 3 CE hour course, so that means it should take you approximately 3 hours to read the text, complete the examination and course evaluation.

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS FOR COMPLETION OF THIS COURSE.

### **The following are steps to follow in completing this course:**

- 1. Read the instructions and review the text and exam.**
- 2. Access the online examination in your account at [www.massagetherapyceu.com](http://www.massagetherapyceu.com).**
- 3. Complete your examination and print your certificate. The exam is open book and there is no time limit for completion.**

You must pass the exam with a 70% or better to pass this home study course. You are allowed to access and take the exam up to 3 times if needed. There is no time limit when taking the exam, and you can save your answers and return at a later date if needed. Feel free to review the text while taking the exam. There are no trick questions on the exam. All of the answers are clearly found in the text. The exam is also included at the end of the text for review before taking the exam.

It is advised to answer the exam questions in the study guide before testing online. That way, when you are testing you do not have go back and forth through the online exam.

Good luck as you complete this course. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us at 866-784-5940, 712-490-8245 or [info@massagetherapyceu.com](mailto:info@massagetherapyceu.com). Most state boards require that you keep your "proof of completion" certificates for at least four years in case of audit. Thank you for taking our Ethics: Contraindications to Massage home study course.

# **Ethics: Contraindications to Massage Text**

## **Introduction**

Massage therapy is the manipulation of the soft tissues of the body intended to improve health and well-being. It can be applied manually or by use of complementary tools. Our ancestors realized the value of touch as a healing tool. Even Hippocrates, the founder of modern medicine, trained his students extensively in massage techniques.

The primary goals of therapeutic massage are to facilitate increased blood flow and lymph, which will promote healing, relaxation, and removal of toxins. Massage Therapists have spent many years trying to inform clients of the benefits of therapeutic massage; and most cases, massage is not only indicated, it is usually very beneficial. Massage therapy and related bodywork modalities are non-invasive and natural. They are usually considered a safe treatment for people.

There are some situations, called contraindications, which make massage inadvisable. There are types of contraindications that all massage therapists and body workers must be aware of to make sure that massage is safe for you and your client. In many cases, although working on a particular area may be contraindicated, it may be okay and beneficial to work surrounding areas to promote the healing process of the body.

## **Definitions**

The definition of Contra- means “against”, and indications are “signs that tell you what to do, one way or another”, so contraindications are “signs or signals which indicate that something should not be performed.” Massage contraindications mean that a patient/client is not able to receive massage therapy or that massage must be limited to certain areas of the body. Contraindications are general precautions that are taught in massage school. This course will expand your knowledge from what you have learned in massage school and refresh you of common contraindications to Swedish massage therapy. Now that massage is increasingly being used as an intervention for various pain and injury conditions, there is more concern about making sure massage therapy is an appropriate intervention for different conditions.

Another aspect of contraindications to be aware of is a precaution. A massage therapy precaution is not always a situation in which massage is contraindicated. Medical precautions in massage therapy occur when your client/patient has a condition in which certain types of massage, or massage therapy application to certain areas should be performed with caution or avoided. Often times, it is recommended to obtain a physician’s approval before performing massage on clients with medical precautions. A comprehensive list of medical precautions is listed later in this text.

When addressing contraindications, the therapists must ask themselves the following questions prior to treating the client/patient:

1. Could the application of massage exacerbate the condition?
2. Could the general massage aggravate the patient’s symptoms?
3. Could massage cause or create problems that weren’t there before?
4. Could massage place more stress on a body that is already in a highly stressed state?
5. Could treating this patient be dangerous to the health of the therapist?

In cases where you can possibly answer yes to any of the above questions, a contraindication or precaution likely exists. It is up to the therapist to determine what type of contraindication or precaution exists and treat the client/patient accordingly.

## **Types of Contraindications**

Contraindications can be classified as **local or relative, absolute or systemic, or medical precautions**. When reading the below section, it is important to understand that contraindications may overlap as well depending on their stage or severity. For example, rheumatoid arthritis may be an absolute condition in the acute or flare up state, but simply a medical precaution in the remission stage or with a physician's approval. It is ultimately up to each therapist to determine what stage or how severe a client/patient's condition is at the time of treatment. A good rule of thumb to remember is, "When in doubt, refer out".

### **Relative Contraindications**

A relative contraindication is an instance where massage should not be performed in certain circumstances or certain areas, but can be done in others. Relative contraindications may also refer to what type of massage is being performed. For example, one type of massage might be contraindicated, such as deep tissue massage on an elderly client, but another type of massage, such as Swedish massage, might be okay.

Local or relative contraindications are conditions where a client is able to receive massage, but not on affected areas. An example of this is not massaging the lower leg of a recently sprained ankle. Positioning may also play a role in local contraindications. The position in which you place your client may be all that needs to be changed in order to be able to perform the massage, such as positioning a pregnant woman on her side instead of in a prone position.

Examples of common local or relative contraindications may be, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Abnormal lumps
- ◆ Abrasions
- ◆ Acne vulgaris
- ◆ Athletes foot
- ◆ Blisters
- ◆ Bruises
- ◆ Burns
- ◆ Carpal tunnel syndrome
- ◆ Colitis
- ◆ Cuts/scrapes
- ◆ Cystitis
- ◆ Goiter
- ◆ Hernia
- ◆ Herpes
- ◆ Irritable bowel syndrome
- ◆ Local inflammation
- ◆ Old surgical incision sites
- ◆ Open wounds

- ◆ Poison ivy
- ◆ Pregnancy before the 13<sup>th</sup> week may need a doctor's note
- ◆ Recent head injury
- ◆ Scars
- ◆ Shingles
- ◆ Skin ulcers
- ◆ Sprains/strains
- ◆ Sunburn
- ◆ Undiagnosed inflammation
- ◆ Undiagnosed lumps or bumps
- ◆ Undiagnosed pain
- ◆ Unhealed burns
- ◆ Varicose veins
- ◆ Warts

**SAMPLE SITUATION:** John, a client and athlete who you see regularly comes to you for a massage. On this day, he reports to you that he has been training for an upcoming race. Yesterday, he was running at the gym and twisted his ankle. You inspect his ankle and discover that his ankle has a fair amount of edema and it looks like some bruising has occurred. John states that the sprain is no big deal and thinks if you massage the area vigorously, it may help the swelling. What do you do? Do you perform the massage as he would like or do you instruct him to ice the area and see his physician?

In this case, it appears that John could possibly be suffering from an acute ankle sprain. You should definitely NOT massage over the affected area. Sprains are a relative/local contraindication to Swedish massage. You should let John know that massage does not benefit recent acute sprains. You can perform a massage to the unaffected areas, but he should see his primary care physician if needed and return in a few days after the edema and bruising has subsided.

### **Absolute Contraindications**

An absolute contraindication is one where massage should not be performed under any circumstances. Absolute contraindications may or may not be permanent. For example, if the condition has resolved from an absolute contraindication such as an acute fever, viral infection and/or inflammation, massage may then be performed.

Some common systemic or absolute contraindications are:

- ◆ Acute conditions
- ◆ Acute rheumatoid arthritis
- ◆ Appendicitis
- ◆ Cardiac arrest
- ◆ Chicken pox
- ◆ Contact dermatitis/diarrhea if due to infection
- ◆ Contagious or infectious diseases, including any cold or flu no matter how mild in may seem
- ◆ Embolism
- ◆ Fever, when a client has an elevated body temperature, which may indicate a more serious disease or condition

- ◆ German measles
- ◆ Gout, during the acute phase
- ◆ Hemophilia
- ◆ Hemorrhage
- ◆ Hives
- ◆ Lice
- ◆ Measles
- ◆ Meningitis
- ◆ Mono
- ◆ Mumps
- ◆ Neuritis, which is a general inflammation of the peripheral nervous system, symptoms depend on the nerves involved, but may include pain, paresthesia, pareses hypoesthesia or numbness, anesthesia, paralysis, wasting and disappearance of the reflexes
- ◆ Pitting edema
- ◆ Pneumonia in the acute state
- ◆ Preeclampsia
- ◆ Recent operations
- ◆ Respiratory failure
- ◆ Ringworm
- ◆ Scabies
- ◆ Sepsis
- ◆ Skin diseases, such as staph, impetigo, herpes simplex, shingles, open sores/lesions until healed
- ◆ Skin diseases
- ◆ Thrombosis
- ◆ Tonsillitis
- ◆ Under the influence of drugs or alcohol, including certain prescription medications

The above conditions may be temporary and once they run their course or after a physician's approval, massage is no longer contraindicated.

Some common systemic or absolute conditions that are permanent are:

- ◆ Advanced kidney failure
- ◆ Chronic active hepatitis
- ◆ Cirrhosis of the liver
- ◆ Deep vein thrombosis
- ◆ Embolism
- ◆ Endocarditis
- ◆ HIV/AIDS, depending on the stage
- ◆ Hepatitis, depending on the stage
- ◆ Intestinal obstruction
- ◆ Kidney failure
- ◆ Liver failure
- ◆ Lupus
- ◆ Lyphangitis

- ◆ Myocarditis
- ◆ Pericarditis
- ◆ Pulmonary embolism
- ◆ Severe acute respiratory syndrome
- ◆ Severe arteriosclerosis
- ◆ Severe atherosclerosis
- ◆ Severe emphysema
- ◆ Sudden onset headaches which has not been diagnosed
- ◆ Syncope
- ◆ Tuberculosis

**SAMPLE SITUATION:** Mary, a new client comes to see you in your office. You have her fill out an intake form and sign an informed consent form. You see that on her intake form she has reported that she has recently been treated with heparin (a blood thinning medication) for a blood clot in her left calf. She also reports that her pain is mostly in her left lower leg and her goal for the massage is to increase the circulation in her leg and break up any remaining clots to release the area. What should you do? Is it ok for massage therapists to work on possible blood clot areas?

In this situation, massage is absolutely contraindicated. Do not perform the massage session. Blood clotting is a very serious condition and absolute contraindication to massage and even though Mary has been under the supervision of a physician, she is still at risk for having a clot. Your massage on her left calf may release a clot and if the clot travels to her heart or lungs, she may die. You need to simply let Mary know that if and when her condition completely clears (she is off of any medication and has been approved by her physician) she may receive a light relaxation massage which can benefit her.

### **Medical Precautions**

A medical precaution is a situation where massage can be performed, but with precautions related to the pathology. Medical precautions in massage therapy occur when your client/patient suffers from a condition in which you may want obtain a physician's approval in writing before performing the massage. For example, you may want to get a physician's ok for cardiovascular conditions such as, hypotension (low blood pressure), hypertension (high blood pressure), and those with pacemakers.

Some common medical precautions include:

- ◆ Asthma
- ◆ Aneurism
- ◆ Bell's palsy
- ◆ Cancer, depending on the type and stage
- ◆ Cardio-vascular conditions
- ◆ Clients taking prescription medications
- ◆ Congestive heart failure
- ◆ Diabetes
- ◆ Edema
- ◆ Epilepsy
- ◆ Heart Problems
- ◆ Hepatitis, depending on the stage



- ◆ HIV/AIDS, depending on the stage
- ◆ Kidney stones
- ◆ Multiple Sclerosis
- ◆ Nervous or psychotic conditions
- ◆ Osteoporosis
- ◆ Osteoarthritis
- ◆ Psoriasis or eczema
- ◆ Rheumatoid arthritis
- ◆ Skin diseases
- ◆ Spinal Stenosis
- ◆ Stroke
- ◆ Trapped or pinched nerves

**SAMPLE SITUATION:** Jennifer, a new client comes to your office for massage therapy treatment. You have her fill out an initial intake form and an informed consent form. You read over her form and see nothing out of the ordinary and discuss her forms and goals with her. During the interview, Jennifer states that she forgot to write that she has been diagnosed with a very mild case of diabetes. She is not under medical treatment at this time and does not take medication for her diabetes. You note the information on her form and continue discussing her medical history. Should you perform the massage?

In this case, it is ok to perform the massage as normal. Diabetes is a general medical precaution for massage therapy and is not necessarily a contraindication to massage. It is important for you as a therapist to be aware of her medical condition, but you can still perform massage as normal. If she reports any symptoms during the massage that you think may be diabetes related, be cautious and either contact her primary care physician or refer her to her primary care physician for care.

## **Summary**

In this country there is a strong movement towards evidence-based medicine, which requires supporting documentation to back up clinical practice. While contraindications are a valuable guideline, too often they are misused and misunderstood in our educational programs. Many massage therapy training programs are lacking in subject matter directly related to evaluating pain and injury conditions. In some cases, massage therapists are advised to avoid an area or avoid massage therapy when using massage is not contraindicated.

The question is “Who decides if massage therapy is indicated or contraindicated?” Massage therapists and bodywork practitioners are responsible for ensuring the medical safety of all those who seek our services. Our schools usually include hundreds of hours of instruction in anatomy, physiology, pathology, and assessment that is meant to give us the skills needed to make decisions about when and when not to massage. They may seem overwhelming, but the key is to understand contraindications, and to understand diseases, the body, and how massage affects it. Massage is generally beneficial for the body, but can be very hard on the body if stressors are present. In these cases, it is appropriate to check with the client’s primary care physician. Certain medical conditions require caution when giving a massage, and if you are ever in doubt it is always best to consult a doctor or other qualified medical practitioner. Taking time to obtain this information from the client will help you reduce the incident of a medical error or causing problems with the client/patient.

In all kinds of massage therapy and bodywork, not just Swedish massage, it is always a good practice to consult a medical professional if you or your clients are not sure about any condition they may have.

## **Headaches – A Contraindication or Indication?**

Headaches can be indicated or contraindicated for massage therapy depending on the type of headache your patient/client is experiencing. Not all headaches are the same and understanding this will help you better treat clients who come to you for treatment of their headaches.

There are two main types of headaches that you need to be aware of and different sub-types of headaches under the two types. The two main types of headaches are **primary and secondary headaches**.

### **Primary Headaches**

Primary headaches are benign conditions in which the headache itself is the primary condition. The most common primary headaches are:

- ◆ Tension
- ◆ Migraine
- ◆ Cluster

**Tension headaches** are a common source of head pain and are often described as a dull ache that starts at the base of the skull or the forehead and may spread to other parts of the head and face as it gets worse or intensifies. Tension headaches occur from stress and/or joints in the neck that become tense/tight and contribute to the pain. Massage therapy usually can be very helpful and is indicated for these types of headaches in relieving pain.

**Migraine headaches** are severe headaches that may be single sided or bilateral. Some migraines are preceded by a disturbance, called an aura, which may include symptoms such as blind spots, flashing lights, tingling or numbness in one or more body regions, and may even cause speech problems and weakness. Migraines can cause a pounding, throbbing, or pulsing pain, and may cause nausea and vomiting. The client/patient may not be able to tolerate bright lights, loud sounds, or strong smells, and all movements may cause an increase in pain. Migraines may be difficult to treat. However, massage therapy is indicated and may alleviate some of the pain. Your patient/client may need to consult their primary care physician for further relief if massage therapy does not alleviate all of the pain.

**Cluster headaches** are intense, one sided attacks of pain. They are clustered at a certain time of day or night. Each episode can last from 15 minutes to an hour and may even occur at night. There are medical treatments that are helpful and massage therapy may be helpful in relieving tension after or between attacks.

**SAMPLE SITUATION:** Jerry, a client that you see on a regular basis, comes to you one afternoon complaining of a moderate to severe headache. He is an attorney and has been facing a deadline to have some paperwork completed and has been under a lot of stress. He reports to you that his headache today started out as a dull ache in the back of his neck. He states that the headache got worse as the day went on and that the pain spread to his forehead. What should you do?

From all of the information reported by Jerry, he is possibly suffering from a moderate to severe tension headache caused by stress and tension from his job and facing a deadline. Massage can be very beneficial for his headache and you should definitely tailor is massage session today around relieving the tension and stress in the musculature of neck and upper back region. You might also want to instruct Jerry to watch his headache and if anything changes for the worse he may need to see his primary care physician for additional help and to return in a few days for another massage session centered around relieving tension and stress in his body.

### **Secondary Headaches**

Secondary headaches are usually headaches that a client/patient has not experienced before. These types of headaches need to initially be addressed by a physician. They are headaches that are secondary to some other process or problem. Once the primary source of pain has been discovered, massage therapy may or may not be used as a treatment.

Types of secondary headaches and conditions which can trigger a secondary headache include:

- ◆ Adverse drug effects
- ◆ Brain abscess that causes a headache
- ◆ Brain tumors
- ◆ Dehydration
- ◆ Encephalitis
- ◆ Fever
- ◆ Medication overuse headache
- ◆ Meningitis
- ◆ Poor circulation which causes a headache
- ◆ Recent trauma such as head trauma
- ◆ Stiff neck
- ◆ Subdural hematomas which cause headaches
- ◆ Temporal arteritis
- ◆ Thunderclap or sentinel headaches

A thunderclap or sentinel headache is an abrupt onset headache. This headache can be caused by a hemorrhaging vessel in the head. The pain usually subsides in one to two days, but can continue for weeks or until the hemorrhage has discontinued. Not all people with a thunderclap headache have a bleeding vessel. If your client/patient reports a loss of consciousness at the onset of pain and states the pain is like nothing they have ever experienced before, refer the client/patient to their primary care physician immediately. Once the true cause has been diagnosed, massage therapy may be performed. Treatment may also include medication and/or surgery depending on what has caused the headache.

Fever, stiff neck, or poor circulation may also cause secondary headaches. Other, rarer conditions which can contribute to the cause of secondary headaches are meningitis, encephalitis, or brain abscess. Any client/patient experiencing a headache which is associated with a fever, lack of peripheral circulation, and generalized neck stiffness (not caused by muscle stiffness or restricted joints) should not receive massage therapy and should immediately be referred to their primary care physician for a diagnosis.

Sub-acute, recent onset, persistent, or recurrent headaches usually happen when a client/patient experiences headaches with an onset of several days to weeks prior before seeking medical help. Causes may include temporal arteritis, brain tumors, adverse drug effects, and subdural hematomas. If you have a client whose headache is gradually getting worse over days, weeks, or even months, you should refer them to their primary care physician or obtain permission before treating them with massage therapy. If the client/patient is in general good health and has been cleared by their primary care physician, massage may be beneficial in relieving pain.

Many commonly prescribed medications may cause headaches as an adverse effect. It has been proven that many medications which people use to get rid of pain can actually cause it. These include both prescription medications as well as over-the-counter medications.

Intracranial hematomas and neck injuries from a recent fall, head injury, or some kind of an accident may cause headaches. Headaches caused by injury should be reported to a client's/patient's primary care physician for correct treatment before performing massage therapy.

Sometimes clients/patients will not give correct information, may forget what happened to them, or why they have the headache/condition. It is very important for you as a massage therapist to always be aware and on guard when observing each and every patient/client while preparing to give a massage. Good intake forms, such as an informed consent and detailed medical history, should be filled out for every client. This protects both you and your clients.

**SAMPLE SITUATION:** Jessica, a regular client of yours calls to make an appointment for a headache that she has been experiencing since the day before. You have an open appointment that day and set up a time for her to come in. Once she arrives, you see that she is not feeling well at all. She states that her headache came on yesterday morning and it was accompanied by a high fever and a very stiff neck. She tells you that her symptoms have been increasing today. She states that nothing out of the ordinary has happened and her stress level is generally low. She is not sure why her headache, fever, and neck stiffness has come on and would like you to massage her back and neck today to help in relieving the pain and fever. What should you do?

Jessica may be suffering from a rare, but worse condition that you cannot help such as meningitis. The fever that she is experiencing is an absolute contraindication in itself, and the other symptoms that she has reported should present a red flag. Do NOT perform the massage and recommend that she see her primary care physician right away. If you have time, you may even want to ask her if it is ok for you to call and set up an appointment for her. You do not want to risk causing her further harm. Once her fever has subsided and it has been approved by her physician, you may perform massage to help her residual pain and symptoms.

## **Endangerment Sites**

Endangerment sites are regions that a massage therapist should be aware of when giving a massage and determining contraindications to massage. An endangerment site is a region of the body in which nerves, arteries, or veins lay close to the body's surface. These areas are not well protected by muscle or connective tissue, and have the potential to be damaged. Deep tissue or deep pressure to these areas is always contraindicated. Along with nerves, arteries, and veins, these areas may contain bony projections that are fragile and may be broken with pressure. Massage therapists should use extreme caution when working close to these areas.

**Endangerment sites of the face and neck are:**

- ◆ Anterior triangle of the neck: The anterior triangle of the neck consists of the medial border of the sternocleidomastoid muscle and the inferior border of the mandible and the trachea. It contains the jugular vein, carotid artery, and the vagus nerve.
- ◆ Posterior triangle of the neck: The posterior triangle of the neck consists of the posterior border of the sternocleidomastoid, the superior border of the clavicle and the anterior border of the upper trapezius muscle. This area contains the brachio-cephalic artery and vein, the sub-cephalic vein, and the nerves of the brachial plexus.
- ◆ Posterior to the mandible: The area posterior to the mandible contains the facial artery and nerve, and the styloid process of the temporal bone. The styloid process is a very delicate bone that can be broken with extreme pressure.
- ◆ Sternal notch and anterior throat: The area of the sternal notch and anterior throat consists of the medial heads of the right and left clavicle, and their attachment, the superior edge of the sternum. This area contains the vagus nerve, associated nerves, and the vessels of the thyroid gland.
- ◆ Axillary triangle of the under arm (armpit): The axillary triangle of the under arm is the area in between the lateral edge of the pectoralis major, the lateral edge of the latissimus dorsi. It encompasses the superior head and medial shaft of the humerus, the upper ribs and the medial aspect of the serratus anterior. This area contains the nerves of the distal brachial plexus, the brachial artery, the axillary nerve, vein, and artery, and the cephalic vein.
- ◆ Deltoid-pectoral triangle: The deltoid-pectoral triangle is narrow area between the superior, lateral aspect of the pectoralis major, the medial aspect of the anterior deltoid, and the inferior border of the clavicle. This area contains the cephalic vein.

**Endangerment sites of the elbow:**

- ◆ Medial elbow: The area between the medial epicondyle of the humerus and olecranon process of the ulna. This area contains the ulnar nerve.
- ◆ Lateral elbow: The area between the lateral epicondyle of the humerus and the olecranon process of the ulna. This area contains the radial nerve.

**Endangerment sites of the abdomen:**

- ◆ Umbilicus area: The umbilicus area, to either side, contains the descending aorta and abdominal aorta.
- ◆ Dorsal body area 12<sup>th</sup> rib: The dorsal area in the region of the 12<sup>th</sup> rib is located over the kidneys, in the lower back.

**Endangerment sites of the lower extremity:**

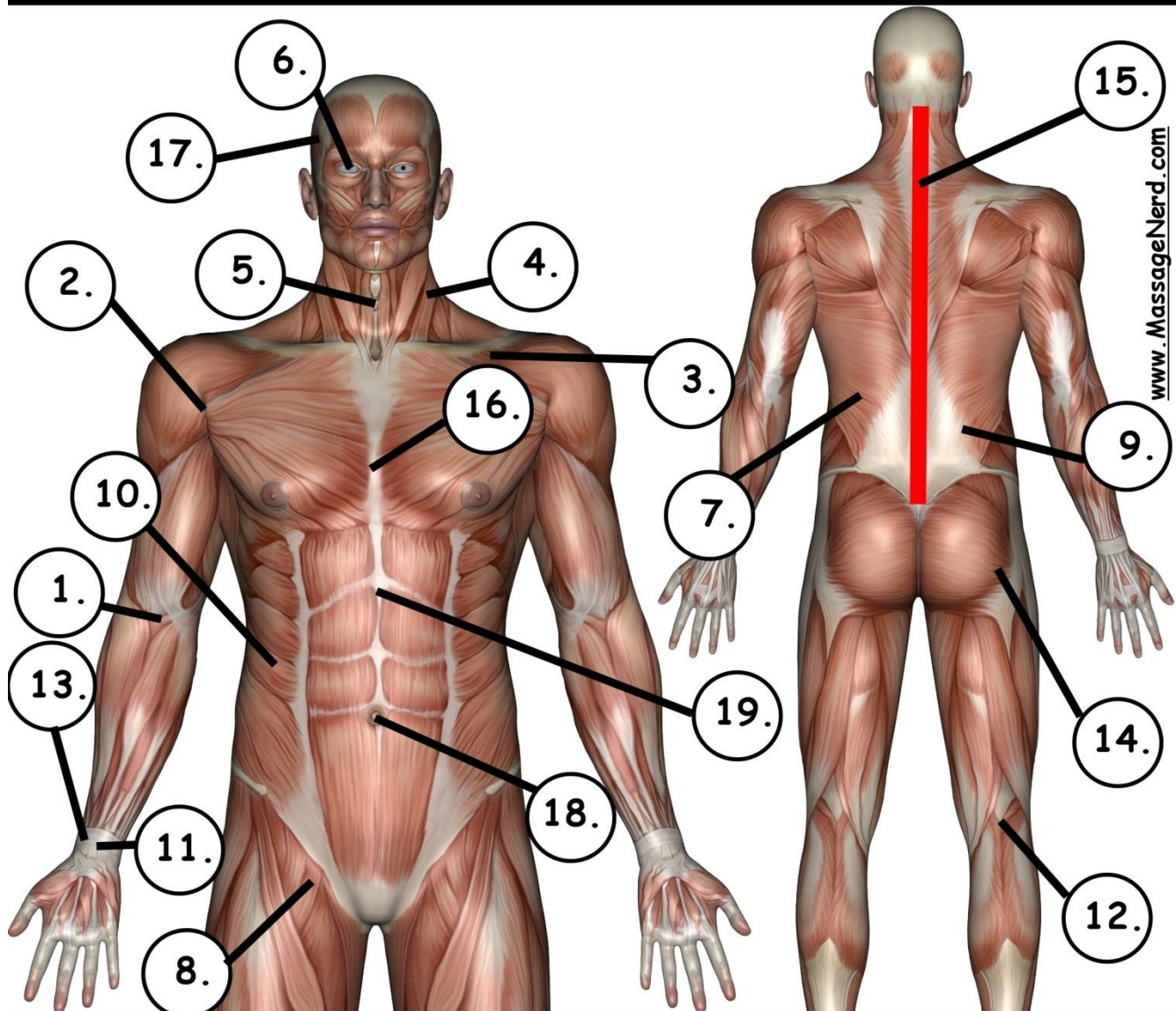
- ◆ Femoral (inguinal) triangle: The femoral or inguinal triangle consists of the lateral aspect of the Sartorius muscle, the superior aspect of the inguinal ligament, and the medial aspect of adductor

longus muscle. This area contains the femoral nerve, the femoral artery and vein, the great saphenous vein, external iliac artery, and the inguinal lymph nodes.

- ◆ Popliteal fossa: The popliteal fossa is a diamond shaped area at the posterior knee. This area contains the popliteal artery and vein, and the tibial and common peroneal nerves.
- ◆ Deep calf: The deep calf region of the lower extremity can be located between the two heads of the gastrocnemius muscle. This area contains the posterior tibial artery and vein.
- ◆ Tarsal tunnel: The tarsal tunnel is located in a groove on the medial aspect of the calcaneus and inferior to and posterior to the medial malleolus. This area contains the posterior artery and vein, deep to the flexor retinaculum.

It is important to be knowledgeable of the above endangerment sites and to get as much information from the client/patient before performing a massage to be sure you, as the massage therapist, are always alert to the area of the body you are treating and the potential for harm. Below is a chart which outlines some of the major endangerment sites on the body.

# Endangerment Sites



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1. Antecubital 2. Axilla 3. Brachial Plexus 4. Carotid Artery  
 5. Cervical 6. Eyes 7. Floating Ribs 8. Inguinal 9. Kidneys  
 10. Liver 11. Median Nerve 12. Popliteal 13. Radial Pulse  
 14. Sciatic Nerve 15. Spine 16. Sternum  
 17. Temporal 18. Umbilical 19. Xiphoid Process

## Professionalism

When we hear the word “**professional**” what comes to mind? In a massage therapy this word can be alleged as a practitioner who is distant and unfriendly. When in fact, there is nothing further from the truth. Being professional simply means that we pay attention to our client’s needs. It also means that we dress and act in a manner that is neat, clean, and polite. Being professional is another way of being kind to clients.

Defining professionalism in massage therapy is a combination of many factors. According to the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork [http://www.ncbtmb.com/standards\\_of\\_practice.htm](http://www.ncbtmb.com/standards_of_practice.htm), professionalism includes:

- ◆ Adhering to the code of ethics and standards of practice set forth by the board
- ◆ Conducting themselves in a manner in all settings meriting the respect of the public and other professionals
- ◆ Treating each client with respect, dignity, and worth
- ◆ Using professional verbal, nonverbal, and written communications
- ◆ Providing an environment that is safe and comfortable for the client and which, at a minimum, meets all legal requirements for health and safety
- ◆ Insuring the client hygienic practices and maintaining a level of personal hygiene appropriate to practitioners in a massage therapy setting
- ◆ Wearing clothing that is neat, clean, and modest
- ◆ Obtaining voluntary and informed consent from the client prior to initiating the session either in writing or verbally
- ◆ Using appropriate draping to protect the client’s physical and emotional privacy
- ◆ Being knowledgeable of their scope of practice and practice only within these limitations
- ◆ Referring to other professionals when in the best interest of the client and/or practitioner
- ◆ Respecting actions of peers, associates, colleagues, and clients

When considering professionalism it is imperative to demonstrate an appropriate demeanor and show respect for peers, clients, associates, and the general public. You as a therapist must respect the race, creed, and sexual orientation of each and every client. Professionalism applies to every aspect of your practice every day.

## Intake Forms

When massage therapists work with a new client, it is important to establish a professional working relationship from the start, explaining the policies as well as making the client feel comfortable. This will form the basis of a trusting, respectful relationship between you and your clients.

We know that clients/patients may not tell us everything (or forget to tell us everything) that we need to know in order to perform a massage session. Always have your new clients fill out intake forms in order to establish clear communication. Proper intake procedures are very important for massage therapists because they can keep you safe from unscrupulous clients, protect your reputation, set nervous first time clients at ease, establish an immediate professional rapport with your client, and give both you and your clients a starting place for dialog.

All of your clients should fill out an intake form that includes:



- ◆ A medical history and questionnaire - the medical questions should cover physical contraindications to massage, such as asking the client about any medical conditions, past or present. This will give you a basis for determining if the client has any areas you may need to be cautious about.
- ◆ Client personal information - such as name address, phone number, and emergency contact.
- ◆ Bodywork session goals - knowing the client's goals from the massage session will help you design a bodywork session to go with the client's needs.
- ◆ Disclaimer and informed consent with your office policy information - this will protect you from potential medical claims and inform your client of the risks and benefits of massage therapy prior to treatment.

### **Informed Consent**

Your intake forms should include some kind of **informed consent**. Informed consent can be either verbal or written and is defined as a client that knows and understands the nature of massage therapy, the procedure involved, and that they have the right to end the session at any time. Informed consent not only creates a professional boundary but it also allows the client to trust in you and the service you will be providing. Clients also need to understand any possible risks associated with their health and receiving a massage, and your scope of practice as a massage therapist. Prior to receiving a massage, you should explain to your client that results vary from person to person and if they are not getting the results that they desire you will refer them to another healthcare professional. Informed consent protects you as a therapist and your clients as consumers. It is a right of every client/patient in every healthcare profession.

### **Office Policy**

Having a client/patient sign your office policy (or a short version of it) will make clear to every new client the expectations of you as a therapist and the expectations them as a client. It will clarify your role as a professional and may answer some common questions that new clients have. When having a client sign your office policy, the form should include the following points:

- ◆ A statement that you do not provide any sexual services
- ◆ That you do not diagnose
- ◆ That you do not prescribe any type of medication or supplement
- ◆ Your policy regarding missed appointments
- ◆ Your policy regarding late arrival
- ◆ Your policy regarding payment and what type of payment you accept
- ◆ That the client has the right to end the session at any time

### **SOAP Charting**

In addition to initial intake forms, professional massage therapists should keep daily treatment records according to some state laws. The treatment records should state the date of visit, what was done, observations of the therapist, and actions taken. **SOAP charting** is often utilized for this purpose. Sample SOAP Charts that you can use in your practice are at the end of the text. The acronym SOAP stands for:

- ◆ Subjective

- ◆ Objective
- ◆ Assessment
- ◆ Plan

Subjective data is information that the client relates to you for that daily visit. For example, if a client states that he/she is very sore in the low back from lifting you would document that information here. Anything you think may be relevant to your treatment of the client that he/she tells you should be written and documented in the subjective portion of your notes.

Objective data is the information that you gather based upon the results of your testing or bodywork. This also includes your observations. For example, if you notice swelling in a client’s ankle, you would document that here. Any observation that you make regarding that client on that day should be written and documented in the objective portion of your notes.

The assessment portion refers to what techniques you utilized or what you did to the client on that particular visit. An example of this would be to write that you performed a one hour Swedish massage with emphasis on the lower back region. Any treatment provided on that particular day needs to be documented in the assessment portion of your notes.

Plan refers to the proposed course of treatment for your client. If you recommended that a client return for another massage in two weeks you would document that as your treatment plan. Any recommendation you make to the client on that particular day should be documented and written in the plan portion of your notes.

The subjective data is gathered and documented before the session begins based upon what the client states to you. The objective, assessment and plan are all formulated after the session has ended based upon what occurred during your interaction with the client. SOAP charting is a simple and effective way of tracking progress of clients. SOAP charting helps you to observe treatment outcomes and can show the client how they have progressed through the course of bodywork treatment. Documentation can be useful in a court of law if necessary. SOAP charting is incorporated in to some state laws and is mentioned by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork in the general business practices section of their standards of practice. Any client information documented is protected by confidentiality and should never be shared with anyone without signed consent from the client.

A client is entitled to request to see their chart at any time. A release of medical information form is also a good idea to have in your practice in the event that another healthcare professional needs to review the information. If you ever need to refer the client to their primary care physician a release form will be practical. The form should contain a statement that reads something like this:

“I, Client Name , give my permission to Your name or business name , to share my health information with Doctor, healthcare professional or family member , regarding my treatment received at Business name .”

The form has to be signed and dated to be valid. In addition to client records, your own personal business records are vital to your practice. Licenses, tax forms, insurance coverage, and continuing education verification should be kept in a safe place and maintained for at least four years. Business

record keeping may vary from state to state and you should make it a point to find out what your state and/or local law requires.

Sample forms at the end of this course include:

- ◆ Informed consent
- ◆ SOAP charts
- ◆ Massage consent form
- ◆ Intake form

### Sources:

1. <http://www.thebodyworker.com/swedishcontraindications.html>
2. <http://en.allexperts.com/q/Massage-1818/Medical-Contraindications-Massage-explanation.htm>
3. <http://ezinearticles.com/?Massage-Contraindications---Why-Some-People-Cannot-Receive-a-Massage&id=1411528>
4. <http://www.massagemelissa.net/1871193.html>
5. <http://www.cloud9massages.com/articles/contraindications.htm>
6. <http://www.massagetherapyfoundation.org/pdf/Contraindications%20for%20Massage.pdf>
7. [http://www.coreinstitute.com/distance\\_education/chapter.cfm?id=20&num=9](http://www.coreinstitute.com/distance_education/chapter.cfm?id=20&num=9)
8. [http://www.amtamassage.org/journal/su02\\_journal/ethically\\_speaking.html](http://www.amtamassage.org/journal/su02_journal/ethically_speaking.html)
9. [http://www.4thconsciousness.com/html/frisco\\_plano\\_tx\\_massage\\_therap5.html](http://www.4thconsciousness.com/html/frisco_plano_tx_massage_therap5.html)
10. <http://www.massagers101.com/massage-treatments/when-to-say-no-to-a-client/>
11. <http://www.massagetherapypractice.com/ominous-headache>
12. <http://www.massagenerd.com>

## Ethics: Contraindications to Massage Exam

- Goals of therapeutic massage are:
  - To decrease blood flow and lymph, and promote healing and relaxation
  - To work on areas of open sores in order to promote healing
  - To increase blood flow and lymph, promote healing, relaxation, and removal of toxins
  - To treat areas of the body that are contraindicated
- The definition of a massage contraindication is:
  - Signs or signals indicating that massage should be performed on any area of the body
  - Signs or signals indicating that massage should not be performed or limited to areas of the body
  - To benefit the body with massage
  - A condition in which deep tissue massage is indicated
- Which of the following are the three types of contraindications?
  - Local or relative, absolute or systemic, or medical precautions
  - Viral or bacterial, local or relative, and medical precautions
  - Prenatal massage, absolute or systemic, and headaches
  - Migraine headaches, prenatal massage, and bacterial
- A situation where massage should not be done in certain circumstances or on certain areas is called a/an:
  - Absolute or systemic contraindication
  - Medical precaution
  - Relative or local contraindication
  - Endangerment site
- All of the following are types of relative contraindications EXCEPT:
  - Blisters
  - Open wounds
  - Diabetes
  - Poison ivy
- Contagious or infectious diseases are what kind of contraindications?
  - Absolute or systemic
  - Medical precaution
  - Relative or local
  - Prenatal massage
- Which of the following is considered a permanent, absolute condition which is contraindicated for massage?
  - Measles
  - Tuberculosis
  - Preeclampsia
  - Ringworm

8. In all kinds of massage therapy, it is a recommended practice to consult a client's primary physician if you are not sure about a condition.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
9. All of the following are medical precautions EXCEPT:
  - A. Asthma
  - B. Embolism
  - C. Osteoporosis
  - D. Kidney stones
  
10. Headaches that are benign conditions, such as tension, migraine and cluster are called:
  - A. Primary headaches
  - B. Secondary headaches
  - C. Tension headaches
  - D. Migraine headaches
  
11. A headache in which a client/patient has not experienced before is referred to as:
  - A. A primary headache
  - B. A secondary headache
  - C. A tension headache
  - D. A migraine headache
  
12. Which of the following is a type of secondary headache?
  - A. Tension headache
  - B. Migraine headache
  - C. Thunderclap headache
  - D. Cluster headache
  
13. Many commonly prescribed medications may cause headaches as an adverse effect.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
14. A region of the body in which nerves, arteries, and veins lay close to the body's surface is known as:
  - A. Palpation site
  - B. Endangerment site
  - C. Relative contraindication
  - D. Absolute contraindication
  
15. Where is the styloid process located?
  - A. In the axillary triangle
  - B. Posterior to the mandible
  - C. Anterior border of trapezius
  - D. Behind the knee

16. The endangerment site that consists of the medial border of the sternocleidomastoid muscle and the inferior border of the mandible and the trachea is:
- A. Posterior triangle of neck
  - B. Anterior triangle of neck
  - C. Sternal notch and anterior throat
  - D. Abdominal area
17. The ulnar nerve is located in the:
- A. Lateral elbow
  - B. Medial elbow
  - C. Inguinal triangle
  - D. Posterior thigh
18. The radial nerve is located in the:
- A. Medial elbow
  - B. Lateral elbow
  - C. Inguinal triangle
  - D. Posterior thigh
19. The popliteal fossa is located in the:
- A. Umbilicus area
  - B. Inguinal triangle
  - C. Posterior knee
  - D. Lateral elbow
20. All massage therapists should have their clients/patients fill out intake forms.
- A. True
  - B. False

This completes the Ethics: Contraindications to Massage home study course.

## Massage Therapy Consent form

Please read carefully and sign before receiving therapy. All information provided is confidential and will not be given out to anyone.

I understand that the massage I receive is provided for the purpose of relaxation and/or relief of muscular tension. If I experience any discomfort during the session, I will immediately inform the therapist so that the pressure and strokes may be adjust. I further understand that massage should not be construed as a substitute for medical examination, diagnosis, or treatment. I understand that massage therapists are not qualified to perform spinal or skeletal adjustments, diagnose, prescribe, or treat any physical, or mental illness.

I understand that any illicit or sexually suggestive remarks or advances made by me will result in immediate termination of the session. I also understand that the License Massage Therapist reserves the right to refuse or terminate massage session to anyone whom they consider to have a condition for which massage is contraindicated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

CLIENT NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Session #: \_\_\_\_\_

S: \_\_\_\_\_

O: \_\_\_\_\_

A: \_\_\_\_\_

P: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Session #: \_\_\_\_\_

S: \_\_\_\_\_

O: \_\_\_\_\_

A: \_\_\_\_\_

P: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Session #: \_\_\_\_\_

S: \_\_\_\_\_

O: \_\_\_\_\_

A: \_\_\_\_\_

P: \_\_\_\_\_

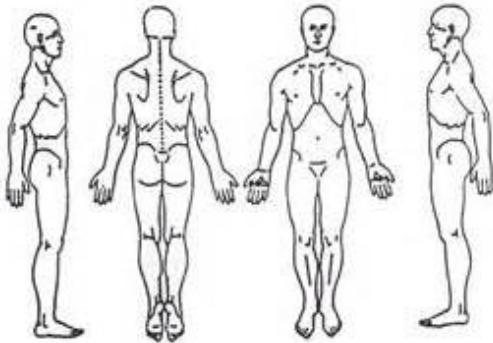
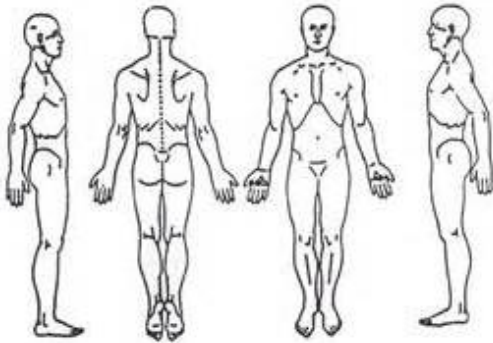
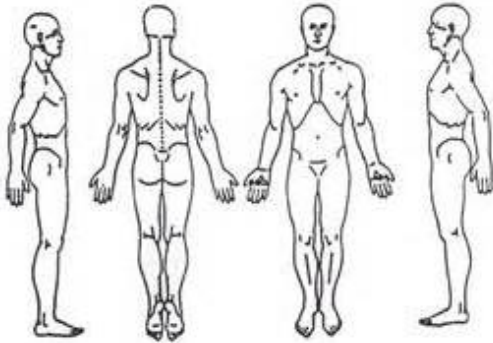
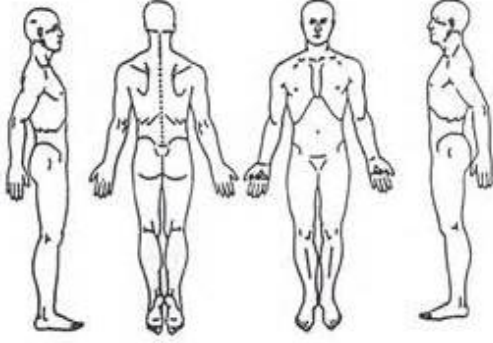
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Session #: \_\_\_\_\_

S: \_\_\_\_\_

O: \_\_\_\_\_

A: \_\_\_\_\_

P: \_\_\_\_\_





Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Dislikes: \_\_\_\_\_

Start: Supine or Prone

Concentrate on: \_\_\_\_\_

Don't Massage: Face-Scalp-Neck-Upper Chest-Arms-Hands-Stomach-Legs-Feet-Glutes-Back

Injuries: \_\_\_\_\_

Surgeries: \_\_\_\_\_

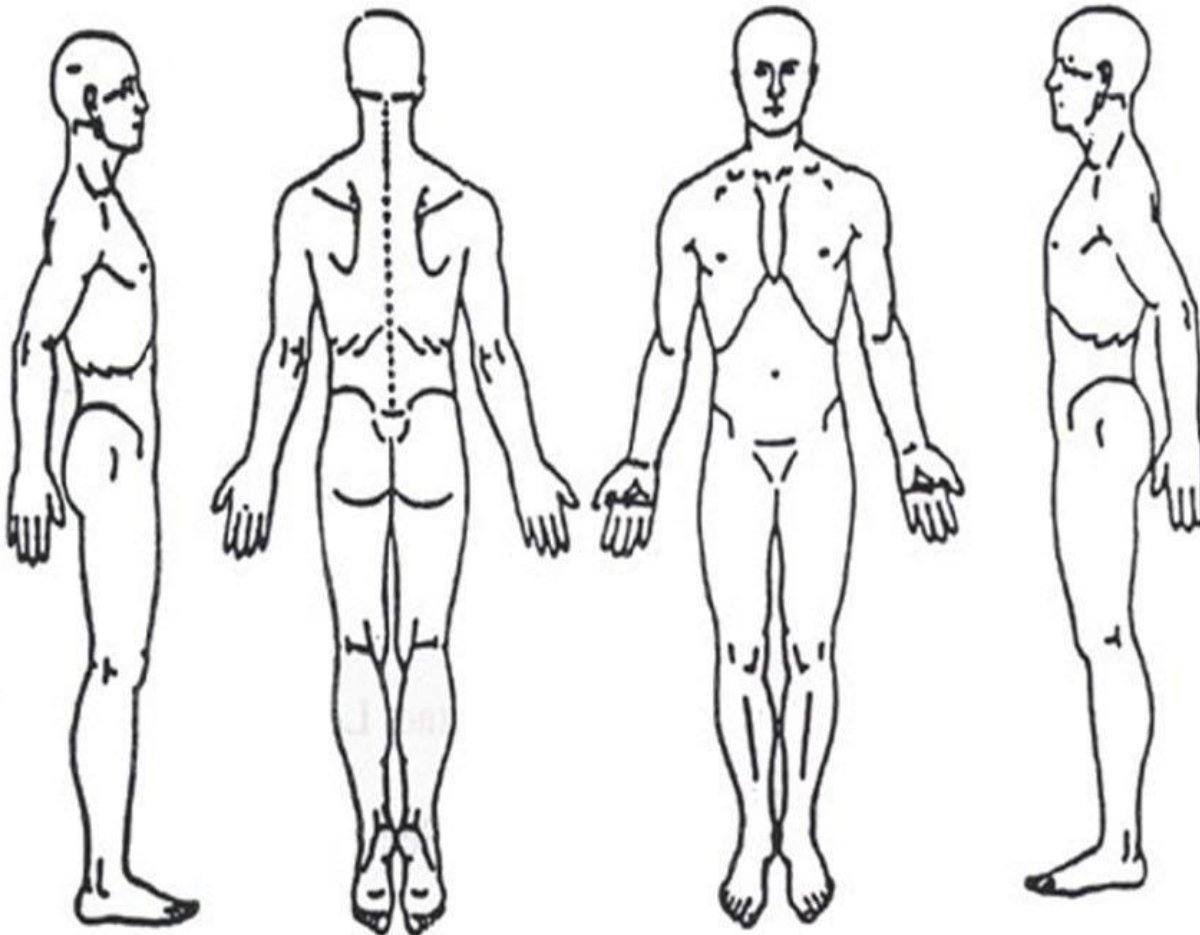
Diseases: \_\_\_\_\_

Medications: \_\_\_\_\_

Client gets: Cold or Hot

Use: Oil or Cream or Lotion

Massages: Once a week or Once every two weeks or Once a month or Every now and then



# Massage Therapy Services' Consent Form

*THIS FORM MUST BE COMPLETED & SIGNED BEFORE RECEIVING A MASSAGE.*

## *General & Medical Information*

Have you ever experienced a professional massage? \_\_\_\_\_

Which areas would you like to focus on during this massage? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any of the following conditions? If yes, please explain below as clearly as possible.

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stress   | <input type="checkbox"/> Allergies                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Contagious disease            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes   | <input type="checkbox"/> Wear contact lenses            | <input type="checkbox"/> Back pain                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant   | <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Cardiac/ circulatory problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arthritis  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive to touch or pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent headaches            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Osteoporosis   | <input type="checkbox"/> Epilepsy or seizures           | <input type="checkbox"/> Bruise easily                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joint swelling   | <input type="checkbox"/> Varicose veins                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Numbness or stabbing pains? Explain below.   |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure. If yes, are you taking medication for this? Explain below.          |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surgery in the past five years? Explain below.   |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accident or suffered any injuries in the past 2 years? Broken bones, etc. Explain below. |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other medical conditions not listed. Explain below.                                      |   |  |

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that the massage I receive is provided for the basic purpose of relaxation and relief of muscular tension. If I experience any pain or discomfort during the session, I will immediately inform the therapist so that the pressure and/ or strokes may be adjusted to my level of comfort. I further understand that massage should not be construed as a substitute for medical examination, diagnosis, or treatment. I understand that massage therapists are not qualified to perform spinal or skeletal adjustments, diagnose, prescribe, or treat any physical or mental illness, and that nothing said in the course of the session given should be construed as such. Because massage should not be performed under certain medical conditions, I affirm that I have stated all my known medical conditions, and answered all questions honestly. I agree to keep the massage therapist updated as to any changes in my medical profile during the session and understand that there shall be no liability on the massage therapists part should I fail to do so. I understand that any illicit or sexually suggestive remarks or advances made by me will result in immediate termination of the session. I also understand that the License Massage Therapist reserves the right to refuse to perform massage on anyone whom he/ she deems to have a condition for which massage is contraindicated.

Client Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_ THERAPIST'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

# Massage and Bodywork Intake Form

## Client Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_ Day Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Eve Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Emergency Contact Name and Phone \_\_\_\_\_ (    ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Referred By \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

## Massage History / Session Information

Have you ever received a professional massage?  Yes  No      Date of last massage \_\_\_\_\_  
What result do you want from your massage sessions? \_\_\_\_\_  
List any exercise activities. Include frequency: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently under the care of a health care practitioner?  Yes  No  
If yes, specify purpose: \_\_\_\_\_  
List current medications and purpose: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Previous History (Include year and treatment received)

Injuries/accidents/illnesses still affecting you: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Surgeries: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Please mark any of the following that you now have or have had.

### Musculoskeletal

- Bone or joint disease
- Tendonitis / Bursitis
- Arthritis / Gout
- Jaw pain (TMJ)
- Lupus
- Spinal Problems
- Other : \_\_\_\_\_

### Circulatory

- Heart Condition
- Phlebitis / Varicose Veins
- Blood Clots
- High / Low Blood Pressure
- Lymphedema
- Thrombosis / Embolism
- Other : \_\_\_\_\_

Please mark any of the following that you now have or have had. (Continued)

Respiratory

- Breathing difficulty / Asthma
- Emphysema
- Allergies specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Sinus Problems
- Other : \_\_\_\_\_

Nervous System

- Shingles
- Numbness / tingling
- Pinched Nerve
- Other : \_\_\_\_\_

Reproductive

- Pregnant: Stage
- Ovarian / menstrual problems
- Prostate
- Other : \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Client Remarks / Comments:

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Skin

- Allergies specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Rashes
- Athletes foot
- Herpes / cold sores
- Other : \_\_\_\_\_

Digestive

- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Ulcers
- Other : \_\_\_\_\_

Other

- Cancer / tumors
- Bladder / kidney ailment
- Diabetes
- Drug / alcohol / caffeine / tobacco use
- Chronic fatigue
- Chronic pain
- Sleep disorders
- Migraines / headaches
- Anxiety / stress syndrome
- Depression
- Contact lenses ( hard or soft )

I have completed this form to the best of my knowledge and will inform the massage therapist of any change in my physical health.

I understand that a massage therapist can not diagnose illness, disease, or any other medical, physical, or emotional disorder, nor perform any spinal manipulations. I am responsible for consulting a qualified physician for any physical ailments that I have.

I understand that massage therapy is a therapeutic health aide and is non-sexual.

I understand that if the massage therapist starts a session late, she will make it up to me at the end of my session if possible, or will reduce my fee accordingly. I understand that if I arrive late, my session will end at the originally scheduled time so the client following me is not penalized.

I agree to give 24-hour notice for a scheduled session that I can not keep. I am aware that I may be charged the full fee for any missed sessions or for sessions that I do not give 24-hour notice to cancel or reschedule.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_