

Primary Care

Most people are very familiar with primary care. This office is your first stop for most of your symptoms and medical concerns. You might seek primary care for the following:²

- Illness: You may see your primary care provider when you notice a new symptom or when you come down with a cold, the flu, or some other infection.
- Injury: You may also seek primary care for a broken bone, a sore muscle, a skin rash, or any other acute medical problem.
- Chronic health conditions: You may work with a primary care provider to manage chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, anxiety, and depression.
- Referral: Primary care is typically responsible for coordinating your care among specialists and other levels of care.³

In addition, you'll probably see a primary care provider (PCP) for regular health screenings, general checkups, and wellness visits.

Primary care providers may be:

- Doctors
- Nurse practitioners
- Physician assistants

There are some primary care specialties as well. For instance, obstetrics and gynecology (OB-GYN) specialists, geriatricians who treat older people, and pediatricians are all primary care providers. But they also happen to specialize in caring for a particular group of people.

Studies have shown that primary care providers benefit the healthcare system by:⁴

- Enhancing access to healthcare services
- Providing better health outcomes
- Decreasing hospitalization and use of emergency department visits

Secondary care

Secondary care occurs when your primary care provider refers you to a specialist. Secondary care means your healthcare provider has transferred your care to someone who has more specific expertise in whatever health issue you are experiencing. They remain in contact with the specialist.⁵

Specialists focus either on a specific system of the body or a particular disease or condition. Examples of specialists include:

- Cardiologists, who focus on the heart and blood vessels
- Endocrinologists, who focus on hormone systems, including diseases like diabetes and thyroid disease
- Oncologists, who specialize in treating cancers, and many focus on a specific type of cancer

Sometimes problems arise in secondary care. These may include:

- Wrong specialist: Sometimes, doctors refer people to the wrong kind of specialist. That can happen because symptoms often overlap between a variety of health conditions. So, your symptoms may suggest one problem when, in reality, it is another condition that requires a different specialist.
- Lack of coordination of care: You may also experience problems if you're seeing more than one specialist and each is treating a different condition. Sometimes in these cases, doctors might not fully coordinate your care. Ideally, specialists should work with your primary care health team to ensure everyone knows what the others are recommending.

Tertiary care

If you are hospitalized and require a higher level of specialty care, your doctor may refer you to a tertiary care center. Tertiary care refers to highly specialized equipment and expertise to treat specific, complex health conditions.

Examples of medicine and procedures performed at tertiary care centers include:⁶

- ☐ Plastic surgery
- ☐ Neurosurgery
- ☐ Organ transplants
- ☐ Head and neck oncology
- ☐ Perinatology (high-risk pregnancies)
- ☐ Neonatology ICU (high-risk newborn care)
- ☐ Trauma surgery
- ☐ High-dose chemotherapy for cancer
- ☐ Dialysis
- ☐ Coronary artery bypass graft (CABG)
- ☐ Burn treatment

A small, local hospital may not be able to provide advanced care, so you may be transferred to a tertiary care center.

Quaternary care

Quaternary care is considered an extension of tertiary care. However, it is even more specialized and highly unusual.

Because it is so specific, not every hospital or medical center offers quaternary care. Some may only provide quaternary care for particular medical conditions or systems of the body.

Swedish massage

Swedish massage is a gentle full-body massage that's great for people who:

- ☐ are new to massage
- ☐ want to release tension
- ☐ desire gentle touch

It can help release muscle knots, and it's also a good choice for when you want to fully relax during a massage.

For this massage, you'll remove your clothes, though you may choose to keep your underwear on. You'll be covered with a sheet while lying on the massage table. The massage therapist will move the sheet to uncover areas that they are actively working on.

The massage therapist will use a combination of:

- ☐ kneading
- ☐ long, flowing strokes in the direction of the heart
- ☐ deep circular motions
- ☐ vibration and tapping
- ☐ passive joint movement techniques

Usually, a Swedish massage will last 60 to 90 minutes.

Hot stone massage

Hot stone massage is best for people who have muscle pain and tension or who simply want to relax.

This type of therapeutic massage is similar to a Swedish massage, only the massage therapist uses heated stones in lieu of or in addition to their hands.

Hot stone massage may help:

- ☐ ease muscle tension
- ☐ improve blood flow
- ☐ alleviate pain
- ☐ promote relaxation
- ☐ relieve stress

During a hot stone massage, heated stones are placed on different areas of the whole body. Your therapist may hold a stone as they massage different parts of your body using Swedish massage techniques with gentle pressure.

Sometimes, cold stones are also used.

You don't wear clothes for hot stone massage, unless you'd prefer to wear your underwear. You'll be covered with a sheet.

Usually, the massage is 90 minutes long.

Aromatherapy massage

Aromatherapy massages are best for people who enjoy scent and want to have an emotional healing component to their massage. This type of massage can help:

- ☐ boost your mood
- ☐ reduce stress and anxiety
- ☐ reduce symptoms of depression
- ☐ relieve muscle tension
- ☐ relieve pain

Aromatherapy massages combine soft, gentle pressure with the use of essential oils. Your massage therapist will usually decide which essential oils to use, but you can let them know if you have a preference. Essential oils are diluted before being applied to the skin.

During the massage, you'll be given a full-body massage while inhaling essential oils through a diffuser and absorbing them through your skin.

Sometimes, an aromatherapy massage will only focus on your back, shoulders, and head. You won't wear any clothing, but underwear is optional.

An aromatherapy massage is 60 to 90 minutes.

Deep tissue massage

Deep tissue massage uses more pressure than a Swedish massage. It's a good option if you have muscle problems, such as:

- ☐ soreness
- ☐ injury
- ☐ imbalance
- ☐ tightness
- ☐ chronic muscle pain

During a deep tissue massage, your massage therapist will use slow strokes and deep finger pressure to relieve tension from the deepest layers of your muscles and connective tissues. You can be naked during this massage or wear your underwear.

The massage will last 60 to 90 minutes.

While deep tissue may be more intense, you shouldn't feel any pain or soreness.

Sports massage

Sports massage is a good option if you have a repetitive use injury to a muscle, such as what you may get from playing a sport. It's also a good option if you're prone to injuries, because it can be used to help prevent them.

Sports massage can:

- ☐ increase flexibility
- ☐ improve athletic performance
- ☐ relieve pain
- ☐ reduce anxiety
- ☐ release muscle tension

A sports massage can be done as a full-body massage or on specific parts of the body that need the most attention. Deep pressure may be alternated with soothing strokes, depending on your needs.

You can have a sports massage while clothed or naked. If you prefer to wear clothing, make sure it's thin, loose, and allows the therapist access to your muscles. Loose shorts and a tank top are options.

The massage will likely last 60 to 90 minutes.

Trigger point massage

Trigger point massage is best suited for people who have injuries, chronic pain, or a specific issue or condition.

Sometimes, areas of tightness in the muscle tissues, known as trigger points, can cause pain in other parts of the body. By focusing on relieving trigger points, this type of massage can reduce pain.

A 2018 review found that treatment of head and neck muscles with trigger point therapy may reduce frequency, intensity, and duration of tension and migraine headaches, though more research is needed.

Trigger point massage uses alternating levels of pressure in the area of the trigger point to alleviate tension.

The massage will include work on your entire body, though your therapist will focus on specific areas that need to be released. You can wear lightweight clothing for the massage, or you can be fully or partially undressed.

This type of massage will usually last 60 to 90 minutes.

Reflexology

Reflexology uses gentle to firm pressure on different pressure points of the feet, hands, and ears. It's best for people who are looking to relax or restore their natural energy levels. It's also a good option for those who aren't comfortable being touched on the entire body.

Reflexology may be especially beneficial for:

- ☐ relaxation
- ☐ reduced pain
- ☐ reduced fatigue
- ☐ improved sleep
- ☐ reduced anxiety
- ☐ improved mood

A 2018 review^{Trusted Source} found that reflexology significantly decreased the anxiety of patients undergoing cardiovascular procedures compared with the control group.

A 2019 clinical trial found that reflexology could reduce fatigue and pain and improve the quality of sleep in patients with lymphoma.

You can wear loose, comfortable clothing that allows access to your legs.

A reflexology massage lasts 30 to 60 minutes.

Shiatsu massage

Shiatsu massage is best for people who want to feel relaxed and relieve stress, pain, and tension. It's a Japanese type of massage that:

- promotes emotional and physical calm and relaxation
- helps relieve pain
- may relieve headache
- reduces muscle tension
- improves sleep and fatigue
- may improve mood

A 2019 study found that shiatsu therapy combined with standard care for lower back pain improved symptoms and quality of life immediately after treatment.

A 2018 study found that self-shiatsu significantly improved sleep quality and daytime fatigue in a group of young athletes with sports-related concussions.

Shiatsu massage works the whole body, but your therapist may focus on areas that need extra attention.

During the massage, your therapist will use their hands, palms, and thumbs to massage certain points of your body. Pulsing or rhythmic pressure is used. You can be fully clothed during this massage.

Shiatsu massages typically last 60 to 90 minutes.

Thai massage

Thai massage is best for people who want a more active form of massage and want to reduce and relieve pain and stress. It can also help improve:

- flexibility
- circulation
- energy levels

Thai massage works the entire body using a sequence of movements that are similar to yogic stretching. Your therapist will use their palms and fingers to apply firm pressure to your body. You'll also be stretched and twisted into various positions.

You can wear loose, comfortable clothing during the massage.

A Thai massage lasts 60 to 90 minutes.

Prenatal massage

Prenatal massage can be a safe way for women to get a massage during pregnancy. It can help reduce pregnancy body aches, reduce stress, and ease muscle tension.

However, many facilities, especially in the United States, do not offer massages to women in their first trimester due to the risk of miscarriage during this time. If you're pregnant, talk with your doctor before receiving massage.

Prenatal massage uses mild pressure similar to Swedish massage. The therapist will focus on areas such as your lower back, hips, and legs. You can be fully or partially undressed, depending on your comfort level.

During the massage, you'll either lie on your side or on a specially designed table with a cutout for your belly. If you've had pain in your calves or other parts of your leg, see a doctor before you have a massage.

The massage will usually last 45 to 60 minutes.

Couples massage

A couples massage is a massage that you do with your partner, friend, or family member in the same room. It brings all the benefits of a regular massage plus the chance to enjoy a relaxing experience with a partner. Other treatments, such as pedicures, facials, and body scrubs, are sometimes offered as part of a package.

You can usually choose which type of massage you'd like to receive, and you and your partner can each get a different type of massage, depending on your preference and clinic offerings.

You'll be on tables side-by-side, and you'll each have your own massage therapist working on your body. You can talk during the massage if you wish. In some cases, you and your partner may have the chance to learn massage techniques and perform them on each other.

Chair massage

A chair massage is best for people who want a quick massage that focuses on the neck, shoulders, and back.

A chair massage can be a comfortable introduction to massage if you've never had one before. Chair massage also helps relieve stress and promote relaxation. This type of massage uses light to medium pressure.

During the massage, you'll remain fully clothed and sit in a specially designed chair. You'll straddle the chair so that your chest pushes into the back of the chair, allowing the massage therapist to have access to your back.

These massages are usually 10 to 30 minutes.

Lymphatic drainage massage

Lymphatic drainage massage, also known as manual lymphatic drainage (MLD), is a type of gentle massage that encourages the lymph fluids to circulate through the body.

The lymphatic system helps remove toxins, and improved circulation can help with a number of conditions, including:

- ☐ lymphedema
- ☐ fibromyalgia
- ☐ edema
- ☐ skin disorders
- ☐ fatigue
- ☐ insomnia
- ☐ stress
- ☐ digestive problems
- ☐ arthritis
- ☐ migraine

According to 2014 research, lymphatic drainage massage was more effective at improving the quality of life of fibromyalgia patients compared with connective tissue massage.

A 2021 review of 17 studies found some evidence that MLD in early stages following breast cancer surgery may help prevent progression to clinical lymphedema, though it may not provide any benefit for moderate to severe lymphedema.

You shouldn't receive lymphatic drainage massage if you have any of the following conditions:

- ☐ congestive heart failure
- ☐ history of blood clots or stroke
- ☐ current infection
- ☐ liver problems
- ☐ kidney problems

It's possible to perform lymphatic drainage massage on yourself at home, or you can seek out a professional. Always talk with your doctor before you try it. These massages usually last 60 minutes or longer.

Cranial sacral therapy

Cranial sacral therapy or craniosacral massage is a type of bodywork that helps release compression in the bones of the head, low back, and spine.

The idea behind cranial sacral therapy is that gentle manipulation of the bones in the skull, spine, and pelvis, can help the flow of cerebrospinal fluid in the central nervous system. It can also produce deeply relaxing results.

Some conditions that may benefit from cranial sacral therapy include:

- ☐ migraine
- ☐ headaches
- ☐ constipation
- ☐ irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- ☐ disturbed sleep cycles and insomnia
- ☐ scoliosis
- ☐ sinus infections
- ☐ neck pain
- ☐ fibromyalgia
- ☐ recurrent ear infections or colic in infants
- ☐ temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders
- ☐ trauma recovery, including trauma from whiplash
- ☐ mood disorders, like anxiety or depression
- ☐ difficult pregnancies

A 2019 review found that cranial sacral therapy was more effective than sham treatment in treating the pain intensity of individuals with non-specific neck pain.

If you experience any of the following, cranial sacral therapy may not be for you:

- ☐ severe bleeding disorders
- ☐ a diagnosed aneurysm
- ☐ a history of recent traumatic head injuries, which may include cranial bleeding or skull fractures

Check with your healthcare professional to determine if this therapy is appropriate for your needs.

These massages usually last 60 minutes or longer.

Abhyanga oil massage

Abhyanga is a type of oil massage from the system of Ayurvedic medicine. The oil is warmed and gently massaged all over the body. This type of massage focuses on nourishing the skin rather than deeply massaging the muscles. The previously mentioned research, as well as a small study, Trusted Source has shown that benefits include:

- ☐ reduced stress
- ☐ activation of the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest)
- ☐ improved skin health and moisture
- ☐ reduced blood pressure
- ☐ reduced muscle stiffness

Abhyanga can be done on your own, or you can find a qualified practitioner. These massages usually last 60 minutes or longer.

Myofascial release therapy

Myofascial release therapy is another type of bodywork that involves releasing stiffness in the fascia, the connective tissue system that contains each muscle in the body. Your therapist will massage and stretch any areas that feel tense with light pressure.

Specific conditions that may benefit from myofascial therapy include:

- ☐ myofascial pain syndrome
- ☐ headaches
- ☐ venous insufficiency

These massages usually last 60 minutes or longer.