

WELLNESS > HOLISTIC HEALTH

# What to Expect From a Thai Massage

By [Wendy Wisner](#) Published on September 6, 2023

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body into yoga-like poses. It's a technique that has been around for thousands of years and is one of the most common forms of alternative medicine in Thailand. <sup>[1]</sup>

Similar to other types of massage, Thai massage can help relax the body and mind. Numerous studies have found clinical benefits to Thai massage, including improvements in pain, joint mobility, and muscle stiffness. <sup>[1]</sup> <sup>[1]</sup>

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## What Is a Thai Massage?

Thai massage is a traditional form of therapeutic massage that has been practiced in Thailand for thousands of years. <sup>[2]</sup> It's believed the technique originated in India during the time of Buddha and then spread to Asia, where it evolved into what is currently known as Thai massage. <sup>[3]</sup>

Currently, Thai massage is considered the most popular form of alternative medicine practiced in Thailand. The technique is recognized and regulated by the Thai government, and many studies have found evidence showing clear health and wellness benefits of Thai massage. <sup>[1]</sup>

Thai massage shares some characteristics with Western massage techniques, such as [Swedish massage](#). For example, the massage therapist uses their hands to stroke and press on the skin and to loosen up tight muscles. But unlike Western massage, Thai massage also involves manipulation and stretching of the body, including positioning the body in [yoga-like](#) poses. The therapist also uses their own body weight to apply therapeutic pressure. <sup>[4]</sup>

Additionally, unlike Western massage where massages often occur on a table, in Thai massage, the massage occurs on a mat on the floor.

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dressed. <sup>[4]</sup>

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## Techniques of Thai Massage

Thai massage is based on the concept that the body has 10 main energy lines called sen lines. These lines are how energy moves and is transmitted throughout the body. The idea is that when the flow of energy is blocked, body dysfunction, discomfort, and pain can result. <sup>[5]</sup>

Thai massage focuses on opening up and releasing energy among these energy lines through three main methods: <sup>[2]</sup>

- Deep pressure massage

- Manipulation of the energy lines through body movements

- [Stretching](#) of muscles and joints

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## What to Expect

If you are going for your first Thai massage, your experience will likely be different from having a Western-style massage.

During a Thai massage, you will keep your clothes on. You will likely be asked to wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing, like you might wear to a yoga class. <sup>[6]</sup>

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different energy tracks (sen lines) of your body. <sup>[6]</sup>

Typically, the massage therapist will start at your feet and then move up along each leg. The massage will then progress to your torso, shoulders, arms, and hands. <sup>[6]</sup>

As the massage therapist moves through each part of your body, they will be applying gentle pressure with their hands and body weight. They will also be moving your body into [yoga-like poses](#) and stretching your muscles and joints. <sup>[6]</sup>

Eventually, the therapist may turn you onto your right and then left side, massaging each side, and then turn you onto your stomach. The therapist will then repeat the massage from feet to shoulders. <sup>[6]</sup>

The entire process usually takes about 90 minutes, but can last up to two hours. <sup>[6]</sup>

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## Benefits of Thai Massage

Several studies have looked at the mind and body benefits of Thai massage and shown promising results. Some of these benefits are similar to those of Western massage techniques while some may be unique to Thai massage.

### Offers Pain Relief

Research has shown Thai massage can provide pain relief for certain

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One study compared the effectiveness of Thai massage and joint mobilization—a manual therapy that passively moves joints to improve motion range and reduce pain. The study found Thai massage was as effective as joint mobilization at reducing pain and disability in the short-term among people with chronic lower back pain. <sup>[5]</sup>

Another study looked at the effects of Thai massage on [myofascial pain syndrome \(MPS\)](#). This condition is marked by muscle pain that is either short-lived or chronic, and can present both as locally and referred—meaning the pain is felt in a place other than where it originates. <sup>[7]</sup>

The study found Thai massage had positive effects on people who have MPS with symptoms on the upper back region. Thai massage also decreased overall myofascial pain throughout the body. <sup>[4]</sup>

## Could Help Reduce Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is a complicated issue with many causes and risk factors. However, some research shows Thai massage may help manage certain cases of chronic pain.

A review of studies found Thai massage could help reduce pain in people with chronic pain for about 15 weeks. More research is needed to better understand this effect and determine the potential long-term effects of Thai massage on chronic pain, according to the study researchers. <sup>[1]</sup>

## May Improve Mental Health

Like other forms of massage, Thai massage can make people feel [calmer](#) and more emotionally balanced. Research has found it also may have implications for mental health. For example, studies have found Thai massage can reduce anxiety and stress while other studies have found it depression along with anxiety. <sup>[8][1]</sup>

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Thai massage may be helpful for people who've had strokes. For example, one study compared physical therapy to Thai massage for treating stroke patients. The research found Thai massage was just as effective as physical therapy in relieving muscle spasticity (muscle stiffness) and improving overall muscle function. Thai massage also was able to improve quality of life for those patients. <sup>[9]</sup>

## May Relieve Urinary Tract Symptoms

Some research has shown Thai massage may be able to help relieve symptoms related to certain urinary tract disorders.

A study looked at lower urinary tract symptoms in older men who had benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), which is when the prostate becomes enlarged, causing urinary issues, pressure, and discomfort. The study found Thai massage reduced the men's symptoms, and was comparable to a medication called Tamsulosin, which is often prescribed to treat urinary tract issues caused by enlarged prostates. <sup>[10]</sup>

## Risks of Thai Massage

The risks of Thai massage haven't been studied widely, but the technique is generally considered to be safe and is commonly used throughout Thailand. <sup>[11]</sup>

However, there have been certain cases in which people have experienced adverse effects during or after Thai massage. For example, one person suffered an acute heart attack after receiving a Thai massage, although it's unclear if the heart attack was directly caused by the massage. <sup>[11]</sup>

The movement of Thai massage may cause your heart rate to rise, which could potentially lead to cardiovascular effects. For this reason, some

There is also the potential for a Thai massage to pull or [strain muscles](#) or cause spinal cord injuries, although this is unlikely if the therapist performs the massage correctly. It's also not clear how Thai massage may impact a pregnant person or their fetus. <sup>[11]</sup>

It's important to check in with a healthcare provider before getting a Thai massage, especially if you have any health conditions. Also, make sure to find a Thai massage therapist who has been thoroughly trained and accredited. You can ask about the therapist's background and training, or ask your healthcare provider for a recommendation.

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## A Quick Review

Thai massage is a traditional massage technique that combines deep tissue pressure, muscle and joint stretching, and gentle manipulations of the body. Research has shown Thai massage to be beneficial for pain relief and for easing symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Thai massage is generally safe, but not be suited for everyone. Make sure to consult with your healthcare provider before receiving Thai massage, especially if you have an underlying medical condition.

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