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12 Types of Massage

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Editor's Note: This article informs you about possible observed health changes related to the use of complementary or alternative medicine based on limited available research. Not all complementary and alternative medicines have been evaluated for safety and efficacy in clinical trials. You should consult a licensed healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment for any health conditions and inform them about any change you make to your regimen.

Massage therapy refers to the manipulation of soft tissue, usually by applying soothing pressure to different parts of the body with the hands and fingers. ^[1] It is commonly used for a variety of reasons in both Eastern and Western cultures.

Massage has many potential benefits, including pain relief and stress reduction. ^[2] It can also help to manage symptoms of anxiety and depression and improve sleep quality. ^[3] Massage may be particularly beneficial for people with chronic conditions, such as [arthritis](#) or

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There are many different types of massage therapy. Learn more about the different kinds of massage, from shiatsu and [reflexology](#) to Swedish massage, deep tissue, and more.

Forms of Massage

Massage therapy comes in many forms. Each type of massage therapy has different potential benefits and risks.

Swedish Massage

[Swedish massage](#)—one of the most common types of massage therapy— involves manipulating the body’s soft tissues with long strokes, light pressure, and kneading or tapping. It’s designed to promote relaxation, loosen up tight muscles, and improve circulation. ^[5]

Researchers have found that Swedish massage can help to:

Reduce joint and muscle pain ^[6]

Decrease heart rate, [blood pressure](#), and anxiety levels ^[7]

Boost immune function and reduce [inflammation](#) ^[8]

Deep Tissue Massage

Deep tissue massage aims to release tension in your muscles by manipulating deeper layers of soft tissue. It involves much firmer pressure than Swedish massage. This type of massage therapy may be right for you if you have [chronic pain](#), underlying conditions, or sports injuries. ^[9]

Studies indicate that deep tissue massage can help to improve flexibility and motion and significantly reduce pain, especially among

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Hot Stone Massage

Usually combined with Swedish massage, hot stone massage therapy aims to improve blood flow and reduce muscle tension through the strategic placement of smooth, hot stones on certain parts of the body. Your massage therapist may also use massage oil to allow for smoother strokes and a more soothing experience.

Hot stone massage has many of the same benefits as other kinds of massage therapy, from reducing inflammation and relieving anxiety to boosting energy levels and mood. One 2019 study found that hot stone massage significantly improved sleep quality among people undergoing [kidney dialysis](#).^[11]

Sports Massage

Sports massage is popular among athletes and people who exercise frequently. It is specifically designed to prevent and treat sports injuries. The techniques used can vary what muscles are most affected by the sport and where you've experienced an injury.

Sports massage can help with various aspects of athletic performance and muscle recovery. According to a meta-analysis, sports massage effectively improves [flexibility](#) and reduces delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) among elite and amateur athletes alike.^[12]

Shiatsu

Shiatsu is a Japanese massage technique based on the principles of traditional Chinese medicine. There are various forms of shiatsu, but they all involve acupressure (applying pressure to specific [acupuncture](#) points

recent study even noted that shiatsu helped children and adolescents with [autism spectrum disorders](#) and/or behavioral disorders in a number of ways—from reducing aggressive behavior to relieving trauma symptoms and improving focus. ^[14]

Thai Massage

[Thai massage](#) is a popular form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) that combines the principles of acupressure and yoga. During a Thai massage, you'll be placed into various passive yoga poses with the help of a trained practitioner, who will stretch your muscles and target trigger points.

Thai massage is more “active” than other kinds of massage. You may prefer it if you'd like to stay clothed (in light, loose, comfy clothing) during your massage session.

This kind of massage has been found to:

- Reduce stress ^[15]

- Provide pain relief for people with chronic [lower back pain](#) ^[16]

- Strengthen the body's [immune response](#) ^[17]

Pregnancy (Prenatal) Massage

Massage therapy is popular during [pregnancy](#), when many people deal with increased levels of stress, pain, and [insomnia](#).

Researchers have found that prenatal massage can improve many aspects of overall well-being during pregnancy. Benefits include: ^[18]

Reduced stress

Pain relief, especially for leg and back pain

Fewer depression and anxiety symptoms

Stronger immune function

Lower risk of premature labor

High fetal birth weight

Meanwhile, massage can also be beneficial in the postpartum period and even during labor. Some women report that massage helped them manage the pain of childbirth. ^[19]

However, most experts recommend waiting until after the first trimester to get a prenatal massage as they can be potentially lead to pregnancy loss. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have concerns about getting a prenatal massage.

Craniosacral Therapy

Craniosacral therapy, also known as sacral massage or cranial osteopathy, is a form of bodywork that uses gentle touch to decrease compression in the spine, skull, and pelvis. This is a somewhat controversial therapy, with many researchers disagreeing about the clinical validity of the practice.

However, there is some evidence that craniosacral therapy may decrease pain and improve quality of life for people with certain conditions, such as: ^{[20] [21]}

[Fibromyalgia](#)

... .

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epicondylitis (tennis elbow).

Normal pressure hydrocephalus (NPH), which is characterized by a buildup by cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) in the brain cavity

Reflexology

First developed by ancient healers in Egypt, China, and India, reflexology—also called regional therapy or zone therapy—refers to the practice of applying pressure to certain points on the feet (and, sometimes, the hands). Each point, or “zone,” is believed to correspond to a particular area of the body.

According to clinical studies, reflexology may be helpful in: ^[22] ^[23]

Relieving joint and muscle pain

Treating insomnia

Reducing limb swelling during pregnancy

Boosting energy levels

Improving respiratory function

Treating certain cancer-related symptoms, such as shortness of breath

Reducing the tingling, burning, and/or prickling pain associated with [multiple sclerosis](#) (MS)

Lymphatic Drainage

[Lymphatic drainage massage](#), also known as manual lymphatic drainage (MLD), involves using rhythmic, light touch—including tapping and circular strokes—to promote the flow of lymph (extra fluid) throughout

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Treat and prevent lymphedema

Promote wound healing

Improve oxygen saturation

Lower blood pressure

Decrease [heart rate](#)

Increase range of motion

Aromatherapy

Some massage therapists incorporate [essential oils](#)—such as lavender, peppermint, lemon, ginger, and tea tree oil—into a massage session to promote relaxation and healing. This practice is known as aromatherapy. ^[25]

There's a growing body of evidence to suggest that aromatherapy massage may have clinical benefits as a complementary therapy. However, research is limited and more studies are needed. ^[26]

Chakra Balancing Massage

Some people believe that deep tissue massage can be combined with the practice of [Reiki](#)—a Japanese energy medicine (EM) technique in which the practitioner uses light touch or holds their hands just over the recipient's body to manipulate energy—to balance the [chakras](#).

According to the traditions of Ayurvedic medicine, the chakras are the body's primary centers of energy. Each chakra corresponds to a particular area of the body. The seven chakras are: ^[27]

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Third eye

Throat

Heart

[Solar plexus](#)

Sacral

Root

Costs of Massage

The cost of a massage varies widely, depending on your state, chosen provider, and the type of massage therapy you choose. According to the Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP) Massage Association, the average cost of a one-hour massage session in the U.S. is \$87 as of 2023. ^[28]

Most massages aren't covered by insurance. However, you may be able to get your sessions covered by insurance if you are prescribed massage therapy due to a diagnosed health condition. Some of the massage providers who may be able to qualify for reimbursement include [physical therapists](#), chiropractors, and occupational therapists. ^[29]

What to Consider Before Getting a Massage

Massage therapy is usually safe, with few side effects for most people. Very rarely, massage has been associated with severe complications, such as: ^[1]

Bone fracture

Blood clot

SKIP TO CONTENT [Massage therapy](#)

A fever

A severe [sunburn](#)

Open wounds

Severe bruising

Dizziness

Nausea

You also shouldn't get a massage if you recently developed a new health condition or acute injury.

If possible, you should look for a massage practitioner who is certified by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB). You can also look for providers who are active members of the American Massage Therapy Association or the Associated Bodywork Massage Professionals.

Before getting a massage, talk to your provider about: [\[31\]](#)

Your health condition(s) and medical history

Any medications you're taking

Your therapeutic goals

The amount of pressure you'd like (light, moderate, or firm)

Any areas of your body you'd like them to focus on or avoid

A Quick Review

Massage therapy offers an effective, low-risk way to cut back on [stress](#) and [anxiety](#). It can also be used as a form of complementary therapy for various health conditions.

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on what you're looking for out of a session, and remember that there are many types of massage! You may have to try a few types before you find the one you enjoy the most.

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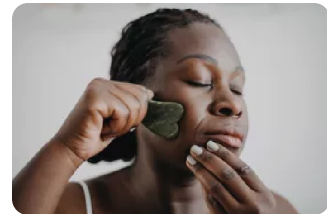
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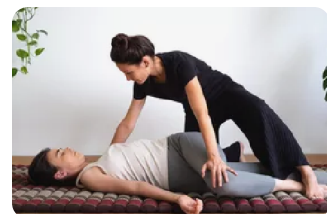
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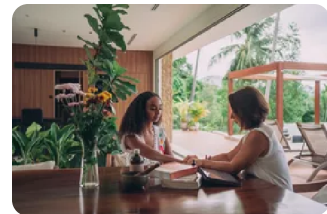
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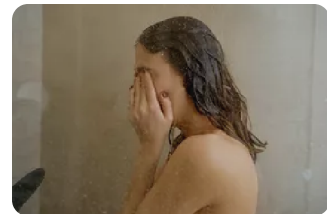
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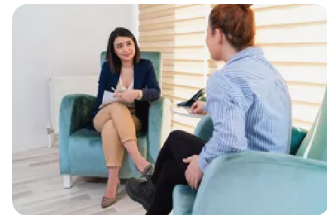
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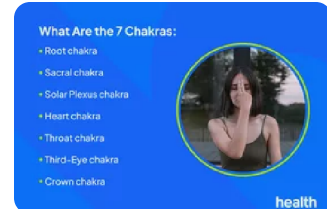
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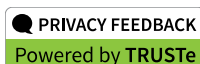
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