



## Massage 101

Various forms of therapeutic superficial tissue manipulation have been practiced for thousands of years across cultures. Chinese use of massage dates to 1600 BC, and Hippocrates made reference to the importance of physicians being experienced with “rubbing” as early as 400 BC. There are references to massage in ancient records of the Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Egyptian, Indian, Greek and Roman nations. References to massage are also found in the Bible and the Vedas. The technique that is currently called Swedish massage was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Per Henrik Ling (1776-1839) as a combined form of massage and gymnastic exercises. Practitioners may use their hands or other areas such as forearms, elbows or feet. Lubricants may be added to aid the smoothness of massage strokes. Techniques used in Swedish massage include (1) superficial stroking in a direction away from the heart or deep stroking towards the heart; (2) kneading in a circular pattern using fingers and thumbs; (3) deep muscle stimulation; (4) rhythmic movements such as slapping or tapping; and (5) vibration. Classical massage aims to provide calmness, relaxation, encourage self-healing and revitalization. Many other variations and styles of massage or touch exist, often developed in specific geographic regions.

Numerous theories exist on how massage therapy may be beneficial, although there is limited research available. It has been suggested that massage may have local effects on muscles and soft tissues and may reduce inflammation, stimulate oxygenation of tissues, soften or stretch scar tissue, break up adhesions, reduce buildup of lactic acid in muscles, induce muscle fiber relaxation, and stimulate healing of connective tissues or damaged muscles. Swedish massage practitioners suggest that this approach can assist the body in delivering nutrients and removing waste products from various tissues. It has been said that therapy transforms nervous energy into a more steady state. Rhythm has been regarded as an important factor in establishing balance and it is considered that the nervous system benefits from the repetition and tempo. Rhythms are felt to have a meditative quality that is refreshing both to the therapist and client.

Environment is often regarded as being integral to massage therapy and often consists of a comfortable, warm, quiet location. Most approaches in hospice session involve the client in a supported, side lying position, reclined in a chair, or sitting in their wheelchair. Depending on the client and which technique is being applied, sessions may last from 15 to 60 minutes. Some patients enjoy the aromatic benefits of scented lotions and relaxing music to enhance sessions. Hospice patients can benefit greatly from receiving massage on a regular basis to enhance their sense of well-being and to feel nurtured during the end stages of life.