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7 TOP STEPS YOU ABSOLUTELY MUST TAKE BEFORE CHOOSING A MASSAGE THERAPIST

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You already know the value of massage. Your doctor might have even prescribed a series of therapeutic massage sessions for you to get rid of pain, increase your flexibility in your back, neck or shoulder. You might just want to get a good massage to relax and de-stress...

But the question is, how do you find a good, qualified massage therapist and what should you look for? Given all the options and the growing number of spas, clinics and therapists hanging out their shingle, you should seek a massage therapist who can support you in accomplishing your specific goals. Every massage therapist will have a specialty or expertise in a particular style, so it is important you find someone who knows how to provide the results you are looking for.

Here are my 7 Top Steps To Take Before Choosing A Massage Therapist:

#1. Begin by Determining Your ‘Goals’. In other words what is the purpose for receiving massage? Are you under stress and feeling frazzled and just want to de-compress? Are you feeling tightness or pain somewhere and are hoping to relieve it? Do you have insomnia, T.M.J., lymphedema, carpal tunnel problems, or any number of other conditions, which you are looking to take care of? Once you know what you hope to achieve from your massage sessions you will be able to communicate that to your therapist.

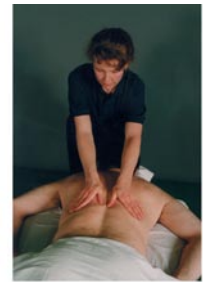
As in choosing any professional, the best way is through a recommendation of a friend or family member. If you know of someone who is pleased with the results they’ve received from a therapist, they will be happy to give you a referral. You can also find a therapist either on the Internet, the yellow pages or by going to a professional association such as the American Massage Therapy Association, (AMTA) <http://www.amtamassage.org> which has a directory of therapists. (Although it is not a requirement to be in practice, therapists who are members of a professional organization such as the AMTA and carry professional liability insurance show a high level of professionalism. There will also be recourse if in fact you have any problems down the road.)

#2. Check Licensure and Permits. Different states have different requirements for licensing. Believe it or not there is no federally regulated license for therapists and each state has its own standards. In California, for example, there is no state license. Each individual city has its own requirements to practice and therapists are required to have a permit for each city in which they practice.

#3. Call the therapist and Interview Them:

Just having a conversation with a prospective therapist will probably give you a good idea of how well you get along. Because of the inherent intimate nature of massage it is paramount you feel comfortable with the person you will be working with therefore, it is not only a good idea, but a necessity to interview therapists before you commit to an appointment with them.

4. Ask About Experience and Length in Practice: Ask how much experience they have working with people who have situations such as yours. If they are new to the industry, they may not be as skilled as a more experienced therapist, but this may also work to your advantage if you are willing to be their ‘guinea pig’. You may be able to help them learn and practice working with people in your condition and receive great care at a reduced rate compared to a more advanced therapist who has lots of experience but charges more because of it. Of course you must decide what is best for your particular situation. Also, find out if their schedule and the location of their office will work for you.



#5. Ask About Credentials and Rates: Find out if they are a member of an association and whether or not they have professional liability insurance. Also find out how they charge for their services. The two most common ways for therapists to charge is either by the length of session or by the style of massage. For example, there is usually a higher rate when you book a pregnancy or deep tissue massage since a higher skill level is needed to perform certain styles and techniques.

Again, discuss your condition and goals. Be sure the therapist is comfortable with your individual situation.

#6. Schedule Your Appointment: Once you feel confident with your choice of therapists, go ahead and book a session or two. Although initial results may very dramatically, it is important to keep in mind that massage is based on therapy, not magic. Depending on the complicity of your condition however, you should begin to feel results after one or two sessions. If you feel no progress is being made after a few sessions, be sure to discuss this with your therapist. As with all professions, there are some techniques that are more effective than others so don't give up on massage as a whole, your therapist might just need to utilize a different technique.

#7. Communicate With Your Therapist: Sessions should start and end on time. The most common length of sessions are 15 minutes, 30, 60 or 90 minutes. Sessions don't typically last longer than two hours, but certainly may. Your massage sessions are important and based on a partnership wherein communication and validation of your needs are critical to successful sessions. If you ever have any questions or concerns regarding your session discuss it with the therapist. If they can't answer to your satisfaction, see if you can clarify your concerns.

If at any time you feel your therapist is being unethical or unprofessional you can file a formal grievance with the professional association in which they belong.

Some Background: In 1993 the US government appointed National Holistic Institute of Health, Office of Alternative Medicine allocated funds to study non-mainstream therapies, such as massage therapy. Since then, numerous studies have come before the public, prompting an increased demand for massage therapists across the country. In response to that demand, insurance companies have begun to recognize that the public is demanding this service, and insurance companies are realizing it may save them money in the long run. As of January 2006, thirty-six states, four Canadian provinces, and the District of Columbia have laws governing massage therapy. In states that do not have laws, local communities in increasing numbers, are regulating massage therapists. Today, massage therapy is one of the fastest growing professions in the country. Once invisible, massage therapists are now found in spas, health clubs, college athletic departments, wellness centers, professional sports organizations, airports, corporations and many massage therapists even travel with portable massage chairs to a wide variety of locations such as offices, street fairs and schools.

Research findings and client testimonials continue making the case for all of us to integrate massage therapy into our health care and lives. From intervention to prevention, availing ourselves of massage therapy from birth (massage on premature babies saves \$4.7 billion annually) through our geriatric years (massage on retirees decreases their sense of isolation and depression) is, indeed, a very wise decision. The winner in all this is YOU!

Our natural instinct if we have a pain is to rub it. As you know from personal experience, when you bang your shin on the coffee table, you'll reach down and do an impromptu massage. Since the dawn of time people did this for themselves and as 'healers' for others. Now science is catching up with what we do naturally to understand all the changes that occur when one receives a massage. The simple act of gentle, skilled touch creates mind-boggling results ranging from the obvious such as pain relief to results such as an increase in killer T cells to ward off cancer, to the hormonal changes that allow men and women to be more fertile and therefore more able to conceive a child! The Touch Research Institute, created at the University of Miami Medical School, run by Dr. Tiffany Fields, is dedicated entirely to research, education, and the understanding of touch. Obviously, massage is in renaissance.

You have made a wise decision to seek physical, emotional and psychological results from massage as an alternative to pharmaceuticals, alcohol, surgery and other more invasive options. Of course massage therapy is not appropriate for every condition or situation but it is truly one of the most beneficial, cost effective therapies around.

As a matter of fact here is a quote I love that is as appropriate today as it was when it was written by a doctor back almost 100 years ago.

“The Human Hand

No single therapeutic agent can be compared in efficiency with this familiar tool...

The Human Hand. It is primarily the instrument of the artist in all departments. The hand is an ever present agent of skill...It is capable of infinite adaptation... If half as much research had been spent on the principle governing manual treatment as upon pharmacology the hand would be esteemed today on a par with drugs in acceptance and power...”

J. Madison Taylor, M.D., 1908



Irene Diamond R.T., is director of the Diamond Wellness Center, which specializes in pain management, massage therapy and injury rehabilitation. She is also the creator of Active Myofascial Therapy – The Diamond Method™ that incorporates manual therapies such as massage and myofascial therapy along with therapeutic exercise, posture, ergonomics and lifestyle changes.

Please contact us at <http://www.DiamondWellness.com> or 415.921.1290.

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Our goal is to spread the benefits of massage, so the more people who have a positive experience with their massage the better!*

For more information on finding a massage therapist in your area or if you have any concerns about whether or not massage is appropriate for your needs, please email massage@diamondwellness.com .

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