

How to Receive a Massage

Often, people can feel uneasy about receiving their first massage. Others who have had massage before find that the experience of massage can vary greatly from one therapist to the next. So, to help you feel at ease and to gain the most out of your massage therapy, I have written this introduction to give new clients a general sense of what to expect in your first session with me.

Intake

The initial session usually lasts an hour and a half. The first half hour of this process is devoted to the intake process. During this time you will fill out an intake form, and I will review the form with you, discussing any health issues, concerns, or expectations either of us may have about the massage. This allows me to know why you have come for massage, what kind of work I will need to do, and what cautions or medical conditions I will need to be aware of while working with you. It also provides you with an opportunity to ask questions you may have regarding the upcoming massage.

After the written part is done, I will also do a postural assessment, as part of the intake. This allows me to understand better how your body works, and to determine what kind of massage will be most helpful from a structural point of view.

Please come prepared for the intake, with thorough health history information, the names and phone numbers of your primary care provider(s) and your emergency contact, as well as any questions or concerns you may want me to answer. Also, please bring suitable clothing you can change into for postural assessment: for men, shorts or underwear you are comfortable being observed in; for women, a two-piece swimsuit, or shorts and a sports-bra, or underwear you are comfortable being observed in.

After the intake is complete, the remaining time will be devoted to the massage itself.

A Word About Clothing

Many clients are unsure whether they should be clothed or unclothed for a massage. Whether or not you wear clothing, or how much clothing you wear, is entirely your decision, depending on your own comfort level.

Generally, most clients find massage more effective with the body fully unclothed. In this way, I as a therapist have better access to the muscular structures of your body, and have a greater variety of techniques I can use to work on you.

I am sensitive to your need for privacy, and will keep your body covered with a sheet or blanket at all times, except for the area being massaged. At no time will I ever expose breasts, genitalia, or gluteal cleavage, as this is contrary to professional draping and modesty guidelines for massage therapy.

If you are not comfortable being unclothed, however, you are welcome to wear underwear, a swimsuit, or loose, comfortable clothing such as sweatpants and a T-shirt.

The Massage Session

Once you have undressed to the level at which you feel comfortable, get on the table and cover yourself with the top sheet. I will check with you before I come into the room to be sure you are ready.

Once the massage begins, close your eyes and allow yourself to relax as completely as possible. Focus your attention on your breathing, which should be slow, deep, and even. Allow yourself to be fully present to the sensations of your body.

When my hands locate areas of tension in your body, consciously try to relax those areas. As you inhale deeply, visualize the breath flowing into the tense area and relaxing it. As you exhale, visualize the tension leaving the body with the breath.

Since my work is therapeutic in intent, I will periodically “check in” with you to be sure that pressure or location of a stroke is having the desired effect. I may also coach you through some breathing or stretching techniques, or ask for other feedback about the massage. However, ordinary conversation can be distracting to you and to me. Good massage requires concentration on the part of the therapist. So, as a general guideline, I ask that you confine your conversation to feedback about the massage.

Allow me to move your limbs into various positions. Be limp, like a rag doll, and do not try to help move your arms, legs, or head. I am a trained professional who will not do anything to hurt you. However, feel free to speak up if anything I do is too painful or ticklish, or uncomfortable in any way.

Contrary to a common notion in our society about massage, it is a healing art and not a sexual service. Occasionally, some clients find that their body becomes aroused as they experience the pleasure of total relaxation. However, sexual behavior during the massage is inappropriate, and will result in termination of the session.

Often, as the body releases tension during a massage, the mind will release emotion. If you suddenly feel sad, angry, or joyful, do not be alarmed. Allow yourself to express these feelings by crying, or laughing, or sighing with the release.

Many people fall asleep during a massage, an indication that the body and mind are releasing stress and tension. I will gently wake you when it is time to turn over or end the massage.

After the Session

When the massage is over, I will leave the room to wash my hands and to allow you some time to rouse yourself and dress. Once you are up and dressed, come on out of the massage space and back into the office. At that time we will do a brief follow up, to see how the massage went for you, take care of financial matters, and schedule your next appointment, if you wish to do so. I may also at this time share with you ideas for home-care, for you to maximize the benefits of your massage treatment.

It is very important to remember to drink a lot of water after receiving a massage. Massage strongly affects circulation, and can release toxins and cellular wastes held in your body, in much the same way as strenuous exercise does. Your body requires plenty of water to process these circulatory and metabolic changes. Occasionally too, people experience mild soreness the day after a massage, due to this flushing of metabolic waste, as one would if having exercised. If this occurs, it is nothing to be concerned about; it should pass within a day or so, after which time you are likely to feel better than ever. Again, drinking plenty of water to flush the system can help to alleviate or avoid such aches altogether.

I hope that your massage is both enjoyable and beneficial, and that this experience will be the beginning of a lifelong practice to help keep you healthy, relaxed, and enjoying life.