



Massage Therapist

Massage Therapists

treat clients by using touch to manipulate the soft-tissues of the body. With their touch, therapists relieve pain, help rehabilitate injuries, improve circulation, relieve stress, increase relaxation, and aid in the general wellness of clients.

Massage therapists typically do the following:

- Talk with clients about symptoms, medical history, and desired results
- Evaluate clients to locate painful or tense areas of the body
- Manipulate muscles or other soft tissues of the body
- Provide clients with guidance on stretching, strengthening, overall relaxation, and how to improve their posture
- Document client's condition and progress

Massage therapists use touch to treat clients' injuries and to promote general wellness. They use their hands, fingers, forearms, elbows, and sometimes feet to knead muscles and soft tissues of the body. They may use lotions and oils and massage tables or chairs, when treating a client. A massage can be as short as 5–10 minutes or could last more than an hour.

Therapists talk with clients about what they hope to achieve through massage. Some massage therapists suggest personalized treatment plans for their clients. They also may offer clients information about additional relaxation techniques to practice between sessions.

Massage therapists can specialize in many different types of massage, called modalities. Swedish massage, deep-tissue massage, and sports massage are just a few of the many modalities of massage therapy. Most massage therapists specialize in several modalities, which require different techniques. Usually, the type of massage given depends on the client's needs and physical condition. For example, therapists may use a special technique for elderly clients that they would not use for athletes. Some forms of massage are given solely to one type of client; for example, prenatal massage is given to pregnant women.

Massage therapists who are self-employed may need to do business-related tasks such as marketing and maintaining financial records. They also may have to buy supplies and do laundry.

IMPORTANT QUALITIES

- **Communication skills.** Massage therapists need to listen carefully to clients in order to understand what they want to achieve through massage sessions.
- **Decision-making skills.** Massage therapists must evaluate each client's needs and recommend the best treatment on the basis of that person's needs.
- **Empathy.** Massage therapists must give clients a positive experience, which requires building trust between therapist and client. Making clients feel comfortable is necessary for therapists to expand their client base.
- **Physical stamina.** Massage therapists may give several treatments during a workday and have to stay on their feet throughout massage appointments.
- **Physical strength and dexterity.** Massage therapists must be strong and able to exert pressure through a variety of movements of the arms and hands when manipulating a client's muscles.

EDUCATION/LICENSURE

Education standards and requirements for massage therapists vary greatly by state and locality. Education programs are typically found in private or public postsecondary institutions and can require 500 hours or more of study to complete. Patrick Henry Community College has a sequential 3-semester certificate program. The new cycle will begin in the fall semester 2015.

PHCC graduates will be eligible to apply to take the national certification examination: the Massage and Bodywork Licensing Examination (MBLEx) <http://www.fsmtb.org/>

After successful passage of this exam, the graduate will be eligible for licensure in Virginia as a Massage Therapist. Massage therapists are licensed in the state of Virginia by the Virginia State Board of Health Professions.

www.dhp.virginia.gov

AVERAGE SALARY

The median annual wage for massage therapists was \$35,970 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$18,420, and the top 10 percent earned more than \$70,140. Most massage therapists earn a combination of wages and tips.

Many massage therapists work part time; only about 1 out of 3 worked full time in 2012. Because therapists work by appointment in most cases, their schedules and the number of hours worked each week vary considerably. In addition to devoting hours giving massages, therapists may spend time recording client notes, marketing, booking clients, washing linens, and conducting other general business tasks.

JOB OUTLOOK

Employment of massage therapists is projected to **grow 23 percent** from 2012 to 2022, much faster than the average for all occupations. Continued growth in the demand for massage services will lead to new openings for massage therapists. As an increasing number of states adopt licensing requirements and standards for therapists, the practice of massage is likely to be respected and accepted by more people as a way to treat pain and to improve overall wellness. Similarly, as more healthcare providers understand the benefits of massage, demand will increase as these services become part of treatment plans.

Massage also offers specific benefits to particular groups of people whose continued demand for massage services will lead to overall growth for the occupation. For example, some sports teams hire massage therapists to help give their athletes relief from pain and to rehabilitate clients with injuries.

Demand for massage services will grow as the baby-boom generation seeks these services as a way to help maintain their health as they age. Older people in nursing homes or assisted-living facilities also are finding benefits from massage, such as increased energy levels and reduced health problems. Demand for massage therapy should grow among older age groups because they increasingly are enjoying longer, more active lives.

In addition, the number of massage clinic franchises has increased in recent years. Many franchised clinics offer more affordable massages than those provided at spas and resorts, making massage services available to a wider range of customers.

However, demand for massage services may be limited by overall state of the economy. During tough economic times, both the number of people who seek massage therapy and the frequency of their massages may decline.

In states that regulate massage therapy, opportunities should be available to those who complete formal programs and pass a professionally recognized exam. However, new massage therapists should expect to work only part time until they can build their own client base.

Because referrals are an important source of work for massage therapists, marketing and networking will increase the number of job opportunities. Joining a professional association also can help build strong contacts and further increase the likelihood of steady work.

It may also be helpful for massage therapists who are seeking to attract new clients to complete education programs in specific modalities

WORKING CONDITIONS

About 46 percent of massage therapists were self-employed in 2012. Many massage therapists work part time; only about 1 out of 3 worked full time in 2012. Massage therapists work in an array of settings, both private and public, such as private offices, spas, hospitals, and fitness centers. Some massage therapists also travel to clients' homes or offices to give a massage. Most massage therapists, especially those who are self-employed, provide their own table or chair, sheets, pillows, and body lotions or oils.

A massage therapist's working conditions depend heavily on the location and what the client wants. For example, a massage meant to help rehabilitate a client with an injury may be conducted in a well-lit setting with several other clients receiving treatment in the same room. But when giving a massage to help clients relax, massage therapists generally work in dimly lit settings and use candles, incense, and calm, soothing music.

Because massage is physically demanding, massage therapists can injure themselves if they do not use the proper techniques. Repetitive-motion problems and fatigue from standing for extended periods are most common. Therapists can limit these risks by using good body mechanics, spacing sessions properly, exercising, and, in many cases, receiving a massage themselves regularly.

Because therapists work by appointment in most cases, their schedules and the number of hours worked each week vary considerably. In addition to giving massages, therapists, especially those who are self-employed, may spend time recording client notes, marketing, booking clients, washing linens, and conducting other general business tasks.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

American Massage Therapy Association

500 Davis Street
Evanston, Illinois 60201
(877) 905-0577

<http://www.amtamassage.org>

Virginia State Board of Nursing

Department of Health Professions
Perimeter Center
9960 Maryland Drive, Suite 300
Henrico, VA 23233
(804) 527-4455

<http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/nursing>

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 Edition*, Massage Therapists, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/massage-therapists.htm> (visited July 20, 2015).