Massage Contraindications
Cautions & Considerations

Massage Contraindications, cautions, and considerations for specific health issues

You may ask yourself if it’s ok for you to get a massage if you’re suffering from an ailment or health issue. This list doesn’t cover every situation, but it does provide some guidance for you and I to consider to determine if a massage is appropriate based on your current health condition. This list contains a brief explanation of massage contraindications and indications for some of the more common health issues. A massage contraindication means massage is not advisable on a particular part of the body or in general. An indication means it’s alright to massage without any additional caution. This information may help you determine if massage is appropriate for you. Communication with me is key so we can determine the best treatment for a particular area or if we should postpone your massage.

**Abdominal aneurysm** - massage of abdomen is contraindicated.

**Abnormal lumps** – first it’s advised that you consult a doctor about the lump. During the massage, I’ll avoid massaging the immediate area around the lump until we’ve received an ok from your doctor.

**Abnormal sensations** – we’ll proceed with caution and may need to obtain your doctor’s approval.

**Acne** – is not contagious but we’ll avoid massage if affected areas are painful, itching, or weeping.

**Alzheimer's disease** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. In addition, it may be very helpful for the Alzheimer patient to have a close friend or family member stay with them during the massage. A therapeutic massage may soothe muscular spasm, improve motor function, and improve psychological well-being.

**Amputation** – Caution will be used if there is broken skin. Massage, tapotement and other tissue manipulation can increase circulation and reduce scar tissue.

**Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease)** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Massage may soothe muscular spasms and improve motor function and psychological well-being.

**Anemia** - extreme fluid movement or pressure on surface vessels may be harmful so massage will be light and soothing.

**Angina pectoris** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy as massage can overwork the heart. All massage will be light and soothing - avoiding endangerment areas and abdominal massage (may cause increased pressure on the heart); you’ll be positioned supine (face up) with a
cushion under your right hip to avoid pressure on the inferior vena cava.

**Arteriosclerosis** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. I’ll avoid localized massage around the carotid artery (may break loose plaque), and not use deep tissue work.

**Rheumatoid arthritis** – A paraffin bath is a wonderful treatment of choice. During the massage we’ll avoid affected joints when they’re in an acute and inflamed stage.

**Osteoarthritis** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. To avoid any unnecessary friction on the affected area I’ll use very slow movements. If your spine is affected (degenerative disk disease) please check with your doctor before starting therapy; we may need to avoid affected area during acute phase; massage can prevent contracture or inhibit associated protection of the affected disk.

**Asthma** – a light massage can reduce stress and loosen the intercostal muscles. I recommend a lighter massage for relaxation rather than deep work which may cause stress or pain and possibly trigger an asthmatic episode.

**Atherosclerosis** – we’ll avoid areas of concern such as posterior tibial, popliteal, femoral, axillary, brachial, radial, carotid, and temporal arteries; general massage is contraindicated in severe cases because fluid movement could cause an embolism (i.e., blood vessel clogged by a foreign substance or blood clot).

**Bell's palsy** – I’ll use caution on the cervical vertebrae but massage can reduce anxiety related to Bell's palsy and reduce swelling of the nerve.

**Benign tumor** – the pressure of a massage may break the capsule, the affected area will be avoided.

**Bone fracture** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy to ensure the fracture is in complete union (typically 6 to 8 weeks.) Until the fracture has healed I’ll work proximal and distal to the site of injury; energy work promotes healing during the acute phase of healing; exercise and stretching may be applied to atrophied muscles when bone has healed appropriately.

**Bronchitis (chronic)** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy as this can be infectious. As long as you’re not infectious, massage can reduce thoracic muscular spasms. If you’re suffering from a fever, we must avoid massage.

**Burns** - check with your doctor before starting therapy; I’ll avoid affected area if painful; energy work is effective; deeper massage can reduce scarring if completely healed.

**Bursitis** – I know this can be painful and to avoid increasing any inflammation, we’ll use caution during the massage; a deep tissue massage is not recommended on the affected area as it may cause too much pain; we’ll check the bicipital groove of the humerus for tendon dislocation.

**Cancer** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Energy work and a relaxing massage helps reduce stress and anxiety aiding in the healing process.

**Carcinoma (basal cell, squamous cell)** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Energy work and
a relaxing massage helps reduce stress and anxiety aiding in the healing process.

**Carpal tunnel syndrome** - massage can relax and improve circulation and nerve enervation of the affected cervical muscles, pectoralis minor muscle, and arms.

**Cerebral palsy** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Massage therapy may improve motor control and reduce related anxiety. Deep tissue work will be avoided.

**Chronic fatigue syndrome** - energy work and a relaxing massage helps reduce stress and anxiety allowing the body to relax; to avoid overworking the immune system we’ll avoid deep tissue work.

**Circulatory system disorders** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. A light relaxing massage will be soothing.

**Cirrhosis of the liver** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy so we can avoid further damaging the liver; we’ll avoid abdominal massage and massage for fluid movement which may stress the liver; massage of lower extremities may reduce related edema.

**Compromised immune system acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy; universal precautions and hygiene requirements will be followed.

**Constipation** – we’ll massage the abdomen in the direction of normal peristaltic action (clockwise) and use caution during pregnancy.

**Contracture** - massage can reduce or prevent contraction and adhesions.

**Contusion** – to prevent extending the bruised area we’ll watch for bleeding and avoid the area of the bruise. In general, energy work promotes healing. Massage directly on the bruise will not occur until clotting has been reabsorbed and the color of the bruise changes.

**Cystic fibrosis** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. During the massage, I will avoid the area around the pancreas. If inflamed, the most effective treatment is tapotement to relieve any blockage in the lungs.

**Decubitus ulcer (also known as a “bed sore)”** - massage can be used as a preventive measure; massage is very effective in improving circulation and alleviating pressure; the area of the affected area will be avoided during the massage.

**Degenerative disk disease** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Your doctor may recommend we avoid affected area during acute phase; the massage may promote undesirable contracture or inhibit associated protection of the affected disk.

**Dermatitis** – this condition is non-contagious so we’ll avoid any areas that are itching, weeping or are painful.

**Diabetes mellitus** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Your doctor may recommend caution, especially in advanced cases; progression may include neuropathy, atherosclerosis, and kidney problems so we’ll consider these additional issues and proceed as necessary.
Digestive problems – we’ll use caution during pregnancy, especially during the first trimester; massage can facilitate peristalsis if done in a clockwise pattern on the abdomen.

Dislocation – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy; energy work is appropriate; we must never try to "set" a dislocation; no stretching or massage will be done until pain and inflammation subsides.

Dysmenorrhea – energy work is very effective; massage can reduce circulatory congestion and associated pain.

Ecchymosis - see subcutaneous bleeding.

Edema - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Massage is contraindicated for edema due to heart decompensation, infections, and kidney diseases; massage for general edema can improve movement of blood and lymph and reduce swelling; watch for edema in pregnancy, which could be a symptom of toxemia.

Elderly clients – you’ll receive more frequent but shorter massages; diseases more common in elderly will be watched, such as osteoporosis (in pelvis, lumbar vertebrae, and cervical vertebrae), atherosclerosis, and parchment skin; client may bruise easily; we will avoid deep work and extreme neck range of movement, especially in the area of the carotid artery.

Emphysema - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Massage can reduce the associated anxiety and relax the involved muscles.

Endometriosis – energy work is very effective but localized massage on the lower abdomen will be avoided.

Extreme fatigue - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy to rule out series conditions such as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), cancer, chronic infection, or hepatitis.

Fever – usually defined as a core temperature of 99.6°F or higher - massage is contraindicated; even energy work will reduce the fever, which will inhibit the immune system at work (fever is an immune system response to infection); there is the possibility of a contagious condition.

Fibromyalgia (fibrositis, fibromyositis) – we’ll be very careful due to the possibility of extreme sensitivity to touch; kneading, petrissage, and friction which can break up adhesions and prevent further formations. You need to let me know how much you can tolerate.

Headache (tension or cluster) – massage can be a tremendous help in relaxing tense muscles in the neck and shoulders and induce relaxation. Headaches are typically caused by tension built up in your neck and shoulders.

Hematoma – we must avoid massage of the affected area.

Hernia – we must avoid massage of affected area.

Herniated disk - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Your doctor may recommend that we avoid the affected area during acute phase; energy work is okay.

Hypertension – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Massage is contraindicated in extreme cases due to possible thrombus (clot) formation; deep tissue work will be avoided or painful massage in all cases; a light soothing
massage may reduce high blood pressure and reduce associated stress.

**Infants** - tissue is very pliable, sensitive, and in extreme growth, so we’ll avoid deep or painful work; ideas of touch develop at an early age, so massage will be short and sweet.

**Infectious diseases** - these are typically contagious; massage is contraindicated if a fever is present and during the acute phase; massage can aggravate the condition and spread infection; some forms of energy work are okay.

**Infectious skin conditions** – because all infectious skin conditions are contagious, massage will be avoided. Please consult a physician.

**Inflammation (acute)** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy; we’ll avoid areas of inflammation; energy work can reduce inflammation.

**Injured limb (non-acute)** – we’ll massage according to your condition; working proximal to the injury can increase circulation and assist in healing.

**Insomnia** - massage will be soothing and relaxing; effleurage from the occiput (base of the skull) to the coccyx (tailbone) can sedate the energy in the governing vessel meridian.

**Laminectomy** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Your doctor may recommend that we avoid affected area during acute phase; energy work is okay.

**Lipoma (or sebaceous cyst)** - if you have not seen a doctor, please do. I’ll avoid direct deep work but massage is generally okay.

**Loss of tissue integrity** - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy; massage is generally indicated.

**Malignant melanoma** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy; your doctor may recommend we avoid affected area.

**Mental conditions** – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy. Energy work may be beneficial; make sure you tell us about any medications you’re taking as some of these may increase sensitivity. Deep tissue work will be avoided since massage can aggravate or cause unnecessary stress.

**Migraine headache** – massaging the neck, shoulders and pressure points can be very therapeutic for migraine sufferers. It’s advisable to check with your doctor to see if he/she recommends a massage during an episode.

**Multiple sclerosis** – due to impaired neurologic sensitivity, I’ll use extreme caution during a massage; massage may help reduce muscle spasm and associated anxiety.

**Muscle cramps** – we’ll use short effleurage from tendons to muscle belly which can reset proprioceptors; compression, strain-counterstrain, proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation, and reciprocal inhibition stretching may be beneficial.

**Neuralgia** – massage is used to relax, relieve tension and release endorphins (natural pain killers).

**Nonunion fracture** – until the fracture is healed the immediate area will be avoided; energy work is the best treatment.
Open sores (and lacerations) – until the sores have healed, the immediate area will be avoided. Please see a doctor for medical care.

Osteitis deformans (Paget's disease) – due to fragile bones, massage is contraindicated.

Osteitis fibrosa cystica - due to fragile bones, massage is contraindicated.

Osteomalacia (rickets) - due to fragile bones, massage is contraindicated.

Osteoporosis - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy; your doctor may recommend we use very light bodywork.

Parkinson's disease - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy; massage may reduce muscle spasms and associated stress and anxiety.

Peripheral neuritis - deeper tissue techniques may be contraindicated because they can cause further inflammation. Instead, light massage, vibration, and soothing techniques are best.

Phlebitis – we’ll avoid the affected area during the massage; energy work is beneficial.

Poliomyelitis - in post-acute phase, massage can increase circulation to affected areas, reduce associated anxiety, and promote muscle tonus.

Postural deviations – massage is a wonderful tool to reduce stress on postural muscles.

Pregnancy - Pregnancy Massage is massage therapy specifically tailored to fit the needs of the expectant mother. It is recommended that the mother-to-be wait until the second trimester to receive massage. In Pregnancy Massage, the mother's body is properly positioned and supported ensuring the comfort and safety for both the mother and the baby. This type of massage has been shown to reduce anxiety and depression and to relieve the aches and pains associated with pregnancy. It also decreases swelling in the arms and legs and helps to alleviate back pain.

Psoriasis – this condition is non-contagious so we’ll avoid any areas that are itching, weeping or are painful. Massage can reduce stress, but can also aggravate the condition.

Reynaud's disease – we’ll begin by applying warmth, the therapeutic heartbeat pillow is an excellent source. Massage helps reduce stress, relax the impacted muscles and may increase circulation.

Scar tissue – energy work is effective during the acute phase; massage should be avoided for 6 to 8 weeks after surgery or injury; after the 6 – 8 week waiting period, cross-fiber massage work breaks up adhesions and stretches polarized fibers of the scar.

Sciatica - when piriformis muscle is the issue, massage may reduce stress on the lumbar area and legs and reduce pain and associated anxiety; when degenerative disc pressure is the issue, we must avoid the affected area (see “Degenerative disk disease” above)

Severe muscle injury – please avoid massage for the first 5 to 7 days; use the standard First Aide procedure "RICE" (rest, ice, compression, elevation) concept; energy work is effective during the acute phase. As with any injury, be seen by a medical professional.

Sprains and strains - ice and energy work are most useful during the first 48 to 72 hours; massage proximal to the injury may improve circulation and healing. As with any injury, be seen by a medical professional.
Subcutaneous bleeding (ecchymosis, hematoma) – during the massage, we’ll avoid the impacted area.

Subluxation - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or beginning massage therapy; massage may reduce muscle spasms and associated stress of the involved muscle.

Substance abuse – because massage can stress the liver and kidneys, I am unable to treat any client who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. I’m happy to reschedule your appointment.

Tempromandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ, TMD) – this condition changes the position of the jaw potentially impacting the way your natural teeth, dentures or bridges fit. Massage is used to relax the muscles and relieve symptoms. If necessary I’m happy to work with your dentist or doctor. If you have been diagnosed with TMJ or TMD, you will need a prescription from your doctor or dentist for me to do intraoral work.

Tendonitis and tenosynovitis - ice is often the treatment of choice; deep tissue massage is the preferred course of treatment as it breaks up adhesions and promotes temporary pain relief; compression of surrounding tissues releases tension.

Thoracic outlet syndrome – we’ll use caution working on the brachial plexus; massage of cervical muscles, shoulder girdle, and pectoralis minor muscle could relieve compression and stress on the plexus.

Trigeminal neuralgia (tic douloureux) - massage helps reduce spasms and associated pain.

Torticollis (wryneck) - massage may relieve stress of affected muscles and associated anxiety.

Tuberculosis – Please consult your doctor before scheduling or starting massage therapy. This is highly infectious and is a contraindication for massage.

Unexplained pain - Please consult your doctor before scheduling or starting massage therapy to determine the cause of the unknown pain.

Varicose veins – we will not massage directly on or distal to the affected area; work done proximal to the area can be beneficial.

Whiplash (post-acute) – massage is a therapeutic too to relieve anxiety and relax the impacted muscles.