

Let's Talk

Communicating with Your Massage Therapist

Sharron Leonard

People get massages for a variety of reasons. Perhaps you're seeking stress relief from the weekly work commute or your wanting to cleanse your body of toxins. Or maybe massage is helping you recover from a sports injury or surgery. Whatever your reasons, it's absolutely important that you explicitly communicate to your therapist the reason you made the appointment. Otherwise you run the risk of not getting what you want.

In addition to explaining any wellness requirement, you also need to clarify your comfort needs during the session so that you feel completely at ease. Most practitioners work to create an appropriate environment with elements

The Body

Sandy Anderson, owner of Relaxing Moments Massage in Reno, Nevada, asks at the beginning of each appointment, "What is the focus of our session today?" -- whether it's the client's first or 21st appointment with her. The therapist needs to know your wellness context. Even if she has your health history, circumstances -- and bodies -- are always changing. Perhaps you were traveling for the last two months spending significant time in cramped seats on airplanes. Maybe you're training for a marathon race, logging numerous miles each week. Or, a more likely scenario, you're stressed and feeling emotionally tapped.

*May you be
well, happy,
peaceful, and
attain bliss~*

-Mark MacDonald



Communicating with your massage therapist is always important, but especially for new clients.

such as the temperature, music, aromatherapy, and table setting. But if anything makes you uncomfortable, feel free -- or rather, feel responsible -- to say as much. Your therapist is as interested as you are in making sure you get what you want from the massage, and building a communicative partnership is key. Remember, communication is a two-way street.

Furthermore, it's important she or he knows about your massage preferences that just make your massage more pleasurable, such as getting extra work on your feet or ending the session with a face massage. Perhaps it's important to you to have the therapist "stay connected" by keeping her hands on you

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rather than, for example, going from your feet to your shoulders. By simply letting her or him know of any such information can vastly improve your session.

The Setting

"I have designed my treatment room to offer a basic comfort level based on my professional experience," Anderson says. "But I need the client to tell me if something is not to her liking. For example, I have provided a small fountain that I thought provided soothing background sounds, but two of my clients have requested that it be turned off because it made them feel as though they needed to run to the restroom."

One important amenity issue that should be discussed by the client and the therapist is massage-table comfort. "I use a heated table covered with a sheet and a blanket because as the active therapist I need the room temperature lower than what is comfortable for the client," Anderson says. "Then I ask the client what adjustments she might want me to make." Even if your therapist doesn't specifically ask about the temperature, background sounds, aromas or whatever other subtle amenities in the room, if there's something that's making your massage less than great, be sure to discuss it with your practitioner.

The Conversation

Conversation can sometimes be a point of contention. Because some clients like to talk during a session while others prefer silence, Anderson believes it's up to the client to dictate this aspect. She does not inhibit talking nor does she initiate conversation if the client is silent. If you want to tactfully make certain your therapist is not overly conversational, it is appropriate to say something like, "You will find that I am not very talkative. I just like to totally relax during this time." While your practitioner may communicate aspects of the massage, don't necessarily take this for her trying to make conversation.

Angie Parris-Raney, owner of Good Health Massage Therapy in Littleton, Colo., believes it's very important for the therapist to explain her actions so the client is not surprised. "Whether I'm

easing a first-time massage client's apprehension by explaining I will only be uncovering one part of the body at a time or I'm doing a rehabilitation treatment for injury, illness or surgery, I have learned from experience the client wants detailed information on what is going to happen," Parris-Raney says. "It is also helpful if she tells me how she feels about what I am doing. Is the stroke too deep or too light? Does she want me to use a slower or faster pace?" If you are unclear about an expectation or a procedure, even if it is something as simple as, "Where is the safest place to put my jewelry?" feel free to ask.

Massage client Andrea Scott explains her frustration with one massage session where she wishes she'd been more vocal. "I like deep tissue massage, and the practitioner was giving me a very light Swedish massage," she says. "I just didn't

feel like I was getting anything out of it and found myself looking forward to the session just being over. For some reason, I thought it would be rude to say anything, but in retrospect, I'm sure she would've appreciated it." Instead, notes Scott, she left disappointed and the massage therapist never had a chance to address the issue.

Your goal as the client is to get what you are specifically seeking in each session. Your practitioner wants the experience to meet your expectations and will appreciate you verbalizing your wellness requirements and personal comfort needs. Your massage therapist is your partner for healthy living, but you need to speak up.



A massage will be much more beneficial if you let your practitioner know what you need.

Soothe Your Skin's Winter Ailments

Kayla Fioravanti

The drying effects of winter are upon us. Here are some at-home ideas to help soothe your skin through this challenging season.

Cleanse

Put away your foaming gels and soaps and stock up on creamy products. Cleansing creams, lotions, and milks are great winter choices, because they don't contain the harsh, oil-stripping detergents found in most cleansing gels.

Tone

Shelve your astringents and switch to a toner. In the cold months, your skin needs to be soothed and balanced, not dried out further.

Moisturize

Choose heavier creams than you would in summer months. You can even use your heavy eye cream on your lips and face. If your skin itches, the dry air is causing the moisture in the top layer of your skin to evaporate quickly. Slather those areas with extra moisture until you feel relief, and never be afraid of using

pure oils on your skin--a bottle of jojoba or olive oil is great to have on hand.

Exfoliate

Exfoliate twice a week to remove dead skin cells and help your skin absorb the extra moisture you are using. Because central heating systems reduce the amount of sebum our skin secretes, contributing to dryness, exfoliation will free this natural regulating agent. Use a cream-based exfoliant with jojoba beads, so your body can soak up the rich oils.

Hydrate

For a simple in-home hydrotherapy treatment, start your day with a steamy shower. Just as you are finishing, switch the water to cold for about 15 seconds and then back to warm for 15 seconds. Repeat the process for two minutes.

Shower and Bathe with Oils

Did you know you can apply body oil, lotion, or cream during your shower or bath? The heat and steam help your skin to thoroughly absorb the moisture.

The Sunshine Vitamin

Shelley Burns

In the world of skin health, we focus on ways to improve skin quality. We work to prevent acne, cellular damage, dryness, and wrinkles. It is less common to discuss how a skin-care strategy may increase risk of developing other health conditions.

Skin cancer is one example. To prevent skin cancer, we protect ourselves with sunscreen--especially during the summer months. But by using sunscreen we are blocking the absorption of vitamin D, the "sunshine" vitamin.

Vitamin D is fat soluble and contains powerful antioxidant and anticarcinogenic properties that can prevent premature aging and cellular damage. Solid research indicates that

vitamin D plays a role in reducing the risk of cancer, specifically breast, colon, and prostate cancers. Vitamin D has been associated with preventing diabetes by reducing insulin sensitivity. It also improves heart health, reduces the risk of multiple sclerosis, strengthens bones, and decreases the effects of seasonal affective disorder.

Vitamin D can help resolve skin conditions like psoriasis, as it plays a role in skin cell regulation, including cell turnover and growth. Vitamin D can be effective in reducing the itching and flaking associated with this disorder. Ultraviolet B (UVB) treatments have long been used successfully in treating psoriasis because UVB produces vitamin D in the body.

Getting between 5-10 minutes of direct sun exposure daily on the arms, face, hands, and back (without sunscreen) can provide enough vitamin D to meet your daily requirements, though sun exposure does present a risk. Because it is difficult to obtain enough vitamin D through food, many prefer to use supplements. Research on the health benefits of ingesting vitamin D led experts to advise an intake of 25-50 micrograms daily.

Shelley Burns is a doctor of naturopathic medicine and completed studies at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine. She has certification in complementary and integrative medicine from Harvard University.

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-Mark MacDonald
,ACMT

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