

Becoming a Massage Therapist

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The field of massage therapy is growing, and for good reason. Massage therapy is interesting, sociable, and well paid. People who are looking for a career that combines personal interaction with the opportunity to promote health should consider massage therapy. These professionals practice the art and science of relieving pain, reducing stress, and healing injuries. This paper will explain the art and science of massage and show how to become a member of this specialty - one of the fastest growing professions in America.

Massage therapy has a wide range of applications. Massage therapists help their clients in the areas of, stress, pain, injury, and relaxation. The clients can include injury victims, performers, old people, athletes, and even white-collar professionals. Massage therapists do their work in many settings, such as therapeutic clinics, doctors' offices, fitness centers, spas, nursing homes, hospitals, and sports teams (Taylor).

The demand for massage therapists has grown in recent years, owing to a significant public trend in the use of massage as a health care option. Earnings vary widely depending on the type of practice and location, as well as on the skill and experience of the therapist. Practitioners with their own facility usually earn the most but they also carry the burden of having to build and maintain a steady and reliable clientele base. Those working for an hourly wage tend to earn less, but they do not have over-head expenses (Capellini 65).

The fundamentals of massage therapy include Swedish massage, deep tissue massage, and trigger point therapy. Some of the more common forms of massage therapy in practical

application include the following. There is relaxation massage: this is typically performed in a spa setting. There is sports massage – a form of therapy practiced in many settings. It involves working with athletes to enhance their performance and recover from injuries. Don't forget clinical massage: This type treats people who suffer from pain and injuries, and is usually practiced in a doctor's office, hospital, or medical clinic. Finally, there is corporate onsite massage. This is offered to employees of an increasing number of forward-looking corporations – corporations that want to keep their employees healthy and happy. This type of therapy typically involves travel for the therapist to an onsite location (Capellini 88).

To become a massage therapist, consider the following steps. First, become familiar with the profession. Visit massage therapists and receive some massages personally. Look online for information about different types of massage or check the local library for massage books. Contact local therapists or schools and ask questions. Research the particular licensing requirements of your city and state, because licensing requirements vary from state to state and city to city. Currently thirty-three states and the District of Columbia regulate massage therapy in some fashion. In states without statewide regulation of massage, municipalities tend to have requirements for a business license (Capellini 213). It is important to become familiar with the regulatory requirements in cities and states where a prospective therapist may wish to practice (Taylor).

Be sure to find and complete a suitable training program. Look for a program that leads to certification and satisfies licensing requirements. Massage schools generally require a high school diploma and a personal interview. Oftentimes massage schools will arrange internships with a local massage practice, so that the student can gain a valuable amount of practical on-the-job experience. Depending on the specific program of study, the school will award either a

certification in a certain specialty or a degree (Capellini 148). Be sure to enroll in a training program that is accredited. One such agency is the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA). At the present time, there are approximately 70 training programs and institutions accredited by COMTA.

Finally, the student must become certified. The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) administers an exam-based national certification program. Those who pass become eligible to use the title "Nationally Certified in Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork" and may use the initials NCTMB. Most states that regulate massage therapists have adopted this exam as a state exam. Graduating students generally take the national certification exam shortly after completing school (Capellini).

The profession of massage therapy is changing – and in all the best ways. In the past, almost all massage therapists worked for themselves. Today, however, there are a growing number of jobs with flexible work conditions. One masseuse's story goes a long way in telling how open the field has become. Take the example of Julie Azzopardi. She was looking to expand her career - and considered massage. Last year, she graduated from a massage therapy program. She loves her work. "I can make my own hours in this field." Are there stresses? Of course. "One thing they taught us in school was how important it is to be alert during the session - so your mind isn't scattered about the ten things you have to do afterward. Julie continues. But if you master concentration, your day is your own. A typical day for me, on a Saturday for example, is that I am in to work at 10 in the morning. If I have a 10 a.m. client, then I usually have a half hour beforehand to get the room ready. I might have as many as four clients a day or as little as two, and client sessions last as short as a half hour and as long as an hour and a half.

I've been really fortunate in the sense that I don't overburden myself. If I am not able to do massages, I am able to block my schedule off." In short, her job is flexible ("Interview").

On occasion, every massage therapist encounters a difficult client. Julie is no exception. "I had a client who wanted a deeper massage than I could give her. I did what I could, but she ended up leaving, saying it was not what she wanted. I said I was sorry and that it was the best I could do. I don't beat myself up about that - obviously I am not the therapist for her. Some people are going to come to me and not like me and other people are going to come to me and say, "Wow, that was a fantastic massage" ("Interview").

As a massage therapist, I would say marketing is the toughest thing. Even though the spa I work at does market (itself), to get the repeat clients I want -- to have that clientele I want to have follow me -- I do need to market myself. If you market yourself, that's how you get clients. I hand out my business cards when I can" ("Interview").

Sound like a good career? Then go for it. In order to find employment as a massage therapist one should look for massage schools, local papers, online employment sites, medical clinics, health clubs, spas, and corporations. People who want to start their own business can find many resources for new business owners through the Small Business Administration ("Massage Therapy").

These are the basics involved in becoming a successful massage therapist. But there's much more to learn. The profession requires an aptitude for working with people, and it can lead to a very satisfying and rewarding career. An early familiarity with the profession, knowledge of the education/licensing requirements, and the right training are the key elements of success. If a person continually improves his or her education, practice, and credential building, that person will not only maintain that success but will enhance it.

## Works Cited

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