



The Top 10 Things To Know About Massage and MS Summary of Interview with Christine Manella

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Chris Manella, PT, LMT, MCMT is the therapy manager for the Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis Institute at Shepherd Center in Atlanta, GA which is ranked by the US News & World Report among the top ten rehabilitation hospitals in the nation. She is both a licensed physical therapist (over 24 years), and a massage therapist (over 15 years). Chris helped to initiate the first inpatient massage program at Shepherd in 2006 for spinal cord injury that continues to present day.

1. The benefits of massage for people with MS are similar to that of the general population. These include:
 - a. stress reduction
 - b. reducing muscle tightness and spasticity
 - c. improving circulation
 - d. fighting fatigue
2. The most dramatic affects Chris has seen regarding massage for people with MS is in alleviating muscle tightness and pain reduction.
3. How can someone with MS find a qualified massage therapist in their area? Go to <https://www.amtamassage.org/findamassage/index.html> and type in your location. Also, contact your state board of licensing to assure that the therapist is licensed and in good standing.
4. What questions should you ask a massage therapist?
 - a. Ask the therapist if they are comfortable treating someone with MS, since some might not be.
 - b. Ask if their treatment room is handicapped accessible.
 - c. Are they comfortable helping to transfer someone to/from a wheelchair?
 - d. Would someone be able to help you undress or should you bring a friend/family member to help you? (note that it is possible to get a massage with your clothes on so ask if that is something you prefer)

5. What types of massage is best for people with MS (i.e., Swedish, etc.?)
There is no one type of therapy that is best for MS. However, avoid hot stone massage, make sure your massage therapist does NOT heat their table, and make sure the therapist knows any areas where you are sensitive or numb so that they don't work too deeply in an area where you can't feel it. It doesn't matter what type of MS you have, it just depends on what your particular needs are.
6. Be cautious if you have a blood clot or history of blood clots, osteoporosis, any open wounds, fever, uncontrolled blood pressure, or if you are pregnant. If you have any of these ask your physician before getting a massage. Also, have the therapist avoid your injection sites for at least the first 24 hours.
7. The internet has a lot of false information about massage! For example, it is NOT true that massage will cause a MS exacerbation.
8. Massage is expensive so you need to determine whether the results of massage are worth the expense and generally it is not covered by insurance. The cost can be from \$40/hr to \$100/hr depending on where you live. Some insurance companies like Aetna or Blue Cross/Blue Shield have lists of massage therapists that will offer reduced rates so call your insurance company to see if they can recommend massage therapists that offer reduced rates. Some physical therapists are also trained in massage and can incorporate it into your treatment (if appropriate). In this situation, massage treatment might be covered by your insurance.
9. Where should you go to read about massage research? Go to:
<http://www.massagetherapyfoundation.org/> or
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=multiple+sclerosis+and+massage+therapy>
10. If your loved one has MS and you would like to learn massage to help them, you can utilize some of these books to self-teach:
 - The Massage Bible - Susan Munford
 - Whole Body Massage - Nitya Lacroix
 - The Trigger Point Therapy Workbook : Your self treatment guide for pain relief ; Clair Davies
 - Modern Neuromuscular Technique : Leon Chaitow . (multiple additions - think 4 is latest)
 - Positional Release Techniques ; Leon Chaitow
 - Amma Therapy ; Complete Textbook of Oriental Bodywork and Medical Principles : Tina and Robert Sohn