

Massage is all about making you feel comfortable in your own skin, and the last thing you want is to have a language barrier make you feel uncomfortable before you even begin. Words you don't know can make you feel like an outsider, which may have the tragic consequence of keeping you from doing what you really want to do when you get a massage — relax and feel better.

Your goal may be to become one of those knowledgeable clients who enters a massage clinic and requests “a bit of cranio-sacral for this headache I've had for two days now, and then some Trager in the hip area to loosen my tight psoas, and throw in some trigger point work on my traps, will you?” Or, on the other hand, perhaps this massage mumbo-jumbo seems completely pointless to you, and all you really want to do is lie down and get rubbed. Even if you belong to the latter group, knowing at least a few of the terms that massage therapists (and those who receive massage) commonly employ is helpful.

This section is a primer on massage lingo to help familiarize you with the terms you may run into when you

- ✓ Contact a massage professional to inquire about rates, services, and so on
- ✓ Visit a massage clinic
- ✓ Read journals, magazines, or books in the field
- ✓ Attempt to explain massage to a friend
- ✓ Ask people to recommend a massage therapist or style for you

Table 5-1 lists several specialized massage words and phrases that at first glance seem deceptively like everyday words and phrases. But don't be deceived. These words, when used in regards to massage, are highly specific and, when used correctly, can lead you to hours and hours of enjoyment, health benefits, and pleasure.

<i>Word</i>	<i>Non-massage definition</i>	<i>Massage definition</i>
Rolfed	Past-tense of “to throw up on,” a variant spelling of “Ralphed”	Deep massage work on connective tissues that realign the body with gravity
Bodyworker	Mechanic specializing in repairing cars after accidents	A practitioner of massage or similar hands-on healing techniques

<b><i>Word</i></b>	<b><i>Non-massage definition</i></b>	<b><i>Massage definition</i></b>
Structural work	Carpentry, mostly done on house frames	Massage that works on the body's muscles and connective tissues to better align them with gravity
Spa	Hot tub or Jacuzzi	Health facility where people go to learn holistic practices, eat healthy foods, exercise, and receive massages and spa treatments
Ayurveda	Misspelling of a famous brand of natural beauty products found in salons	An ancient healing system from India that uses diet, meditation, herbs, and massage to balance the body
Swedish	Anything from the country of Sweden	The most well-known and widely practiced form of massage in the Western world, consisting of stroking, kneading, applying pressure, stretching, and so on
Trigger point	The fine, pointed end of a pistol's trigger	A tight, tender spot in a muscle that responds well to massage
Connective tissues	Kleenex brand facial tissues all linked together in a box	The web of tissue (primarily collagen fibers) that surrounds your every muscle, organ, and bone, holding your body together
Deep tissue	Kleenex stuck deep between the cushions on your couch	A type of massage that targets the deeper layers of muscle and connective tissue
Energy work	Repairs on the electrical lines of your house	Type of massage that focuses on vital, invisible energies in your body

*(continued)*

**Table 5-1 (continued)**

<i>Word</i>	<i>Non-massage definition</i>	<i>Massage definition</i>
Adhesion	The sticky mark left on your skin after removing an adhesive bandage	Muscle and connective tissue fibers that are stuck together because of injuries, scars, aging, and lack of movement. Massage can help separate most adhesions, which are sometimes painful, though not usually dangerous.
Drape	Decorative material that hangs in front of a window	Towels, sheets, and so on, used to cover a person receiving a massage
Knots	Things tied in ropes	Tight bands of muscle fibers and connective tissues that massage often softens
On-site massage	Massage given at construction sites	Seated and clothed massage given in special chairs — usually in offices, in stores, or at special events

## Bon jour, monsieur masseuse

You walk into a health club and sign up for a massage. A big, burly, bodybuilder of a man walks out, shakes your hand in his massive paw, and tells you his name is John.

"Nice to meet you," you say, slightly awed. "How long have you been a masseuse?"

"I'm not a masseuse!" he thunders, causing you to shake in your sneakers. And once again you have that terrible realization that you've flubbed up the whole masseur/masseuse thing.

"Sorry," you stammer, confused and embarrassed, but inside you're also a little mad: How are you supposed to remember the difference between those silly French words, and who made them up in the first place anyway?

Strangely enough, it was a Dutch man, Dr. Johann Mezger (1839–1909), who decided to

use French words to describe the movements of massage, and even the word "massage" itself. The words for someone who performs massage therefore come from the French also:

✓ A **masseur** is a male practitioner of massage.

✓ A **masseuse** is a female practitioner.

An easy way for you to remember the correct term is to think of *monsieur* — the French word for Mr. — which sounds like masseur. And an even easier method is to avoid the masseur/masseuse dilemma altogether by using the more modern, non-gender-based term "massage therapist" for males and females alike, which is what most professionals prefer, anyway.



## Chapter 6

# Look Who's Coming to Touch You

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▷ Stalking the elusive referral
  - ▷ Locating a massage therapist
  - ▷ Developing a relationship with your massage therapist
  - ▷ Deciding whether licensing matters
- .....

**Y**ou're no doubt absolutely convinced that massage would make a truly superb addition to your life, and you're just about ready to pick up that phone (yes, that one, right over there), dial one of the contact numbers I'm about to give you in this chapter, and order up your very first session of "touch take-out." Soon, a chipper and thoroughly professional person will show up at your door carrying a monstrous padded folding table. He or she will open the table in the privacy of your own comfortable dwelling. You'll smile self-confidently, take all your clothes off, and then . . . *wait* a minute!

Did I say, "Take all your clothes off?" Well, by golly, I guess I did. Suddenly, this whole, wonderfully abstract concept of massage has become disconcertingly real. And, in spite of your appreciation for the undeniably therapeutic benefits of massage, if that professional stranger were to ring your doorbell right this minute, you may be tempted to say, "Excuse me for a moment, will you? I just have to go get my law degree at Columbia University and then I'll be right with you."

If that sounds like you, don't worry. This chapter's purpose is to make you more comfortable with the people who will be massaging you, including people you already know, with whom sharing massage will be a new adventure.

## *Stalking the Elusive Referral*

One time-honored concept used to battle your fear of a stranger in your home is to assure that the person who shows up on your doorstep to give you a massage is *not* a stranger. You can accomplish this goal in two ways:

- ✓ Give your cousin Billy several thousand dollars and send him through massage school so you can call him later and make an appointment.
- ✓ Get a referral.

The second option is by far the more common choice, but that doesn't mean you should entirely dismiss the concept of financing massage school for friends or family members. The world needs more massage therapists! If you happen to be extremely wealthy, do the world a favor and set up a massage-school trust fund. (The investment may even be tax deductible.)

### A six-point mental checklist (to go over in your mind before deciding which massage therapist to try)

No matter how qualified and highly recommended a massage therapist may come to you, and no matter what other people say about her, *you* still must decide whether she's the right massage therapist for you. Remember, you're very likely to share a great deal of yourself with this person (massage therapists are like hair dressers on steroids when it comes to the confiding-in factor). And, because your massage therapist will get to know your body better than anyone else except an intimate partner, you have to be willing to trust her. Sometimes, you have no precise way to gauge which massage therapist will make precisely the best "fit" with your personality, and no amount of analytical deliberation will help you decide who to choose.

That said, try using this quick checklist to judge your own gut reaction to the person you're about to spend a considerable amount of quality time with:

1. Does she immediately make you feel like you're important?
2. Does she look you right in the eye and fill you with a sense of utter confidence so that you're already feeling better before she even touches you?
3. Is she someone you'd like to emulate as far as calmness and tranquility go? Like it or not, you will probably look upon your massage therapist as a role model in the relaxation category. A tense, uptight massage therapist isn't setting a good example.
4. Is she "soft" where she needs to be soft (unobtrusive and non-opinionated) and "hard" where she needs to be hard (unrelenting in her serious desire to see you feel better)?
5. Is she someone you feel an immediate sense of empathy with? To use a precise scientific term here, do the two of you *click*?
6. Is she the right sex? The decision on whether to receive massage from a male or female massage therapist is entirely up to you. Many people have no preference, as long as the massage therapist is competent and strong, but others feel more comfortable with one sex than the other in a massage setting. Most massage establishments will give you a choice when requesting a massage therapist. After you get started with the actual massage, you'll probably find that the massage therapist's gender doesn't really matter as much as you may have thought.

Of course, you may be more comfortable going to the "neutral ground" of a professional massage establishment rather than inviting someone unknown into your home. See the section "Visiting a clinic" later in this chapter for more information.

In case you're wondering who to ask for a referral without embarrassing yourself, the following list may come in handy. Actually, you may be surprised at how many people can potentially help you find a massage therapist.

First, you probably should NOT ask certain people to refer a massage therapist, including . . .

- ✓ Certain physicians who are not aware of the benefits of massage and who may think that all massage therapists are "quacks."
- ✓ Your Aunt Gertrude who had a massage once on a cruise and now considers herself an expert.
- ✓ People who are currently under indictment for health-care fraud.

After you cross those sources off your list, you can still find plenty of helpful folks ready to steer you towards the nearest pair of helping hands. Some of those places where you're most likely to get a good referral from include . . .

- ✓ The contact numbers at major massage associations and accrediting organizations (see the section "Organizations That Can Help You Find a Massage Therapist" later in this chapter).
- ✓ Enlightened physicians who are aware of the benefits of massage and who are more than happy to refer you to the ones they work with. In fact, many doctors these days have a massage therapist or two on staff.
- ✓ Athlete friends who receive massage as part of their training.
- ✓ A co-worker or family member who's had a particularly good experience with the massage therapist she's been using for an extended period of time.
- ✓ The "best-of" articles that health and beauty magazines such as *Shape*, *Self*, *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, and so on often feature.
- ✓ Your friend Tina, the one who wears the Birkenstock sandals all the time and has that look of blissed-out satisfaction on her face even when she's standing in line at the grocery store checkout counter.

## Getting a Helping Hand

You can collectively refer to the four numbers I'm about to give you as "massage central." Among them you'll find the contact information for over 80,000 qualified massage therapists in the U.S. right at your fingertips.

Drum roll please . . . and the contact numbers are:

- ✓ To find a massage therapist who is a member of the oldest nationwide organization, the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA), call toll free, 888-843-2682, for their Find-A-Massage-Therapist<sup>(SM)</sup> Location Service.
- ✓ To find the nearest member of Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals (ABMP), call 800-458-2267.
- ✓ To find a member massage therapist of the International Massage Association (IMA), call 202-387-6555.
- ✓ For a list of massage therapists who have taken the test given by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) and are therefore Nationally Certified in all 50 U.S. states, call 703-610-9015.

Of course, among those 80,000+ massage therapists, you're going to find quite a range of skills and offerings, and there isn't one, single tried-and-true means of prequalifying someone. However, you are living in an extremely lucky time, oh fortunate massage recipient, because in the past several years the number of highly skilled and fully trained massage pros has grown at an amazing rate all around the world.

Following is a list of contact numbers for professional massage practitioners in several countries:

- ✓ Australia: Massage Australia, Sydney, tel. (02) 4757 3050
- ✓ France: French Federation of Masseurs Kinesitherapeutes (FFMKR), Paris, tel. 01 44 83 46 00
- ✓ Italy: Federazione Nazionale dei Collegi dei Massofisioterapisti (F.N.C.M.), Rome, tel. 03 94 61 915 499
- ✓ U.K.: The Institute for Complementary Medicine, London, tel. 00 44 171 237-5165

## Locating a Massage Therapist

If for some reason you can't locate a massage therapist by simply calling one of the numbers listed previously, you can pursue several other avenues in quest of massage.

## *Checking the ads*

Each locale has its own regulations regarding the advertising of massage, and sometimes the regulations vary from city to city. What may be perfectly legal in Los Angeles, for example, can be verboten in Sioux City, Iowa.

Beware those ads featuring massage therapists with huge muscles, wearing black leather vests with no shirt underneath, staring straight into the camera with a come-hither look in their eyes, especially in San Francisco. These pictures may be a clue tipping you off to the extra curricular intentions of this particular massage therapist, licensed or not. Then again, it could be a fashion statement.

## *Letting your fingers do the walking*



In some areas, massage therapists must include an official massage license number as part of any Yellow Pages listing for massage. According to Dan Ulrich, past president of the Florida State Massage Therapy Association, the inclusion of the license number in Yellow Pages and other ads significantly reduced the amount of unethical massage advertising. Although the license number is not mandatory everywhere, it's a clue that you're dealing with a therapeutic professional. If you don't see a license number or some other professional credentials listed, call and ask for one.

## *Opening the bureau door*

You may occasionally run into ads for massage service bureaus that guarantee you a massage within a specified period of time (usually within a couple hours). The bureaus have a central number that you call, and they send one of the many independent massage therapists on their list out to you at your choice of location. Quite often, these are very up-and-up enterprises run by entrepreneurial massage therapists who have discovered a new way to multiply their effectiveness and their income. At times, though, the quality of the services offered can be a little iffy, because all the massage therapists aren't carefully screened all the time in all the bureaus. So, if you're not personally familiar with the service, and you haven't received a specific recommendation, you're never sure exactly what you're going to get when you call one of these places. Bureaus are most useful when you're traveling and have no other means of contacting a massage therapist.

### Getting the most massage for your money

When dealing with your massage therapist, certain tactics can increase happiness for both of you, and in the process, maximize the value you receive from your experience.

- ✓ **Offer to pay up front for a discounted series of massages:** For example, if the massage therapist charges \$50 for a massage, offer \$400 dollars for 10 massages. Often, massage therapists appreciate the immediate cash flow and the guarantee of ongoing business. This arrangement is good for their business, and good for your pocketbook.
- ✓ **Ask for a massage in exchange for referring a new client to your massage therapist:** She will appreciate the new customer, and you deserve the recognition.
- ✓ **Inquire about rates for longer massage sessions:** Often the price drops proportionally with the length of the massage, and you can receive a 90-minute massage for not too much more than a 60-minute massage. A massage therapist who charges \$50 for an hour massage may offer an hour and a half massage for \$65 or \$70, for example.

### Going back to school

Wherever you are, one excellent way to get in touch with a massage practitioner is to call a massage school in your area. There are more schools around than you think — the U.S. alone has over 800. Look in the phone book, under “vocational schools” or “schools, massage therapy.” The schools often have a list of graduates in the area that they can recommend, and quite often they offer massage services in a clinic in the school.



One excellent deal that many people take advantage of is known as the *student massage clinic*. In this setup, the students receive part of their training by working on real massage customers, under supervision, of course. Student massages go for only fraction of the normal cost, usually only  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  the going rate of a professional massage in the area. More often than not, the students are already quite good at what they do, and dollar for dollar this option is one of the best bargains in massage.

Keep in mind that you may be asked to fill out a detailed feedback form after the massage, for training purposes. Also, the student clinics usually take place in a big room with curtains separating the massage tables. Quite often, an instructor stops in to observe the student in action. So if you're a super-private individual who doesn't like to have other people around when you're getting a massage, the student clinic is probably not for you. Also, if you have a specific health problem that you'd like to address with massage, it's best to visit a licensed professional. For relaxation and stress relief, though, student massages are usually as effective as more expensive professional massages because the students are trying extra hard to please you (and pass their coursework at the same time!).

## *Pampering Your Massage Therapist*

After you choose a massage therapist and begin to develop a working relationship with him, a few endearing personality quirks may begin to surface. Some massage therapists work barefoot, even in the winter, for example. Others hold a giant quartz crystal over your body before the massage. And some tape a bunch of magnets under their massage table to "align your energy" while they work on you. Try not to take your massage therapist's idiosyncrasies too seriously. They're just trying to do the best job they can. It's just that some of their methods may seem a little, um, colorful at first. Refer to rule # 9, "You're the boss," in Chapter 7 for advice on letting your massage therapist know what you're comfortable and what you're not comfortable with.

As a general rule, massage therapists are a finicky and extremely sensitive lot. They're somewhat like pure-bred cats, and although their job description calls for a great deal of touching, they also need to receive strokes themselves (often to that most delicate muscle, the ego). If you become an expert at scratching behind the ears of your massage therapist's self-image, you can coax a better performance from him, and your relationship will be a happier one all around.

The following are some simple points to remember whenever you're dealing directly with your massage therapist:

- ✓ **Always offer encouragement first before you criticize:** For example, if your massage therapist is applying a little too much pressure in a particular area, definitely let her know about it, but first say something like, "What you were doing a minute ago felt really great. You can lighten up the pressure a little right now, though."
- ✓ **Always, always, always praise the massage your therapist just gave you immediately after you receive it, even if this is the seven hundred and eighty-ninth massage you've received from her:** The immediate gratification of this simple act is powerful. It's the same reason all an actress's friends rush backstage after the play to heartily laud her skills. The ego muscle is most delicate directly after the big performance, and for a great massage therapist, every massage is a type of performance.
- ✓ **Always communicate clearly about exactly what fee you expect to pay for exactly which services:** Pricing of massage services may be a sensitive issue. Be clear on the answers to the following questions before you begin:
  - Is the charge for an hour and fifteen minute massage higher than that for an hour massage?
  - Does the massage therapist have a cancellation policy?
  - Does your massage therapist reimburse insurance claims?

## *Licensing Touch*

Being a wise consumer, when you head out looking for a massage pro to rub you the right way, you'll want to ask yourself that all-important question: Is she licensed? The problem here is that not all good, professional massage therapists in all areas are licensed. In the U.S., only half the states even require licensing for massage. Some states require no license at all, and in others the licensing is county-by-county or city-by-city. So even someone who is very highly trained and takes her job very seriously may be license-less, through no fault of her own.

Internationally, licensing rules for massage therapists vary widely from country to country. Some countries, like Singapore, for example, have little or no regulation, while in other countries, like France, massage therapists are part of the medical community and operate out of their own medical clinics. The best course of action in foreign countries is to ask someone you trust to recommend massage. Also, you can read through Chapter 17 for some more suggestions.

The rules concerning massage licensing are too complex and changeable to list here. They differ from area to area and time to time. In fact, in Santa Monica, California, where I first started working as a massage therapist, the actual laws on the books stated that nobody could open a massage clinic within 500 feet of a church, and in order to receive your city license to practice, you had to take a test certifying that you were free of all venereal diseases. Go figure.

If you want information about how massage practitioners are licensed in your area, you can call the board or department in your state that regulates massage therapists. If there is no such regulating board, check with a local massage school to see what kind of education and certification is normal for practitioners in your area.

The best thing to do when you're trying to determine the professional status of any individual massage therapist is to ask the therapist. I know, this strategy is stunningly simple, but it works. If she doesn't know anything about licensing, you may have an unprofessional person on your hands. On the other hand, if she knows her stuff, she can tell you exactly who to call or where to look to verify local licensing requirements in general, and hers in particular.

Because this whole licensing issue is so confusing in many areas, you're wise to consider certification as an equally, if not more, important factor in determining who to choose as your massage therapist.

### Original sin?

Some massage therapists think that requiring licensing for massage is almost sinful, because they perceive what they do as art. They figure that licensing massage is like licensing a painter to paint, or a writer to write. Ridiculous! These people thoroughly oppose any attempts at

control or regulation. They often live in cabins in rugged-individualist states such as Vermont, which, as an interesting side-note that has absolutely nothing to do with massage, is the only state that has managed to keep out Wal-Mart stores.

If a massage therapist has graduated from a bona-fide massage school, he has received a certificate of completion, and this certificate often notes the number of hours completed, specialties studied, and other relevant information. This certification may be the single most substantial piece of evidence of a massage therapist's dedication to his craft, especially in those areas where licensing is not required.

Another type of certification is awarded to those massage therapists who complete a test given by a certification board, such as the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB). This certification is another way of determining competency.



Remember, in massage, just as in a marriage, it's not the actual piece of paper, but the level of commitment on the participants' part that is most vital to the success of the relationship. A fancy, gold-embossed massage license hanging on the wall in a frame is no guarantee that you're going to like a given massage therapist's technique. And, on the other hand, someone with no certificate or license at all may be one of the most highly skilled massage therapists you'll ever meet. When it comes down to choosing a pro, go with your heart and your intuition.



## Chapter 7

# The Rules for Receiving Massage

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Following guidelines for receiving a massage
  - ▶ Getting in tune and staying in touch
- .....

**F**rom the day you were born, your body has been hanging around you like a shadow. It never leaves you alone. You wake up in the morning, and there your body is, faithful as a puppy, thumping its little tail against your freshly washed bedspread. At first, having a body is a novelty, a fact that you can see reflected in the faces of babies and small children. Even the most mundane details about their bodies fill them with delight. “Oh boy, there’s my hand again!”

As you mature, however, you become more accustomed to having a body, and it begins to bore you. This boredom usually occurs as young people enter their teenage years. “Oh boy, my hand again, big deal.” At this point, they begin to pierce their bodies in various locations and cover them with decorative tattoos. By the time people are full-fledged adults, though, most of them have begun to concentrate on other things, leaving their bodies far behind. The only time they really get connected to their bodies is when they’re learning a new skill of some kind, like soccer, or neurosurgery.

The result? Most people take their bodies for granted. One of massage’s main objectives is to get you back “into” your body again. A good massage should rekindle your childlike enthusiasm for life.

In order for massage to help you achieve the lofty goal of getting back in touch with yourself, you need to follow certain guidelines, which I just happen to outline in this chapter. At first, some of these “rules” may seem a little simplistic to you. Others may appear irrelevant. However, I give you my personal guarantee that if you try them out when you’re on the receiving end of a massage, you’re going to get much more out of the experience.

So, approach these guidelines with an open mind, apply them when you feel that doing so is appropriate during your own massage exchanges, and watch your enjoyment of massage soar to levels beyond your expectations.

The rules for receiving massage are, in fact, quite similar to the Ancient Secrets of Life as passed down by Big Important Spiritual Leaders for thousands of years. Yes, it's true; you can learn every really important thing in life by lying down and getting rubbed.

Honing your skills at receiving massage is more than simply a way to feel better. It's also a way to improve your life. Read through these rules, practice them, and you'll see what I mean.

## *Rule #1: Keep Breathing*

When you receive a massage from a professional, she may remind you several times in a soft, soothing voice to breathe. And you may be tempted to say right back to her in a not-so-soothing voice, "I'm already breathing, in case you haven't noticed."

Don't be offended. The massage therapist's comments aren't meant to imply that she thinks you're deceased, and she's not trying to insult you for your poor breathing skills. In fact, many massage therapists start each and every massage with a series of deep breaths, regardless of how obviously alive you are to begin with.

A massage therapist may tell you to take deep breaths during a massage for the following reasons:

- ✓ To help you focus on the sensations you're feeling in your body rather than the internal monologue going on in your mind
- ✓ To get you to fill your lungs and thus all your cells with fresh oxygen, enlivening your entire body
- ✓ To help you become aware of muscles that you've been holding tense so you can start to relax them

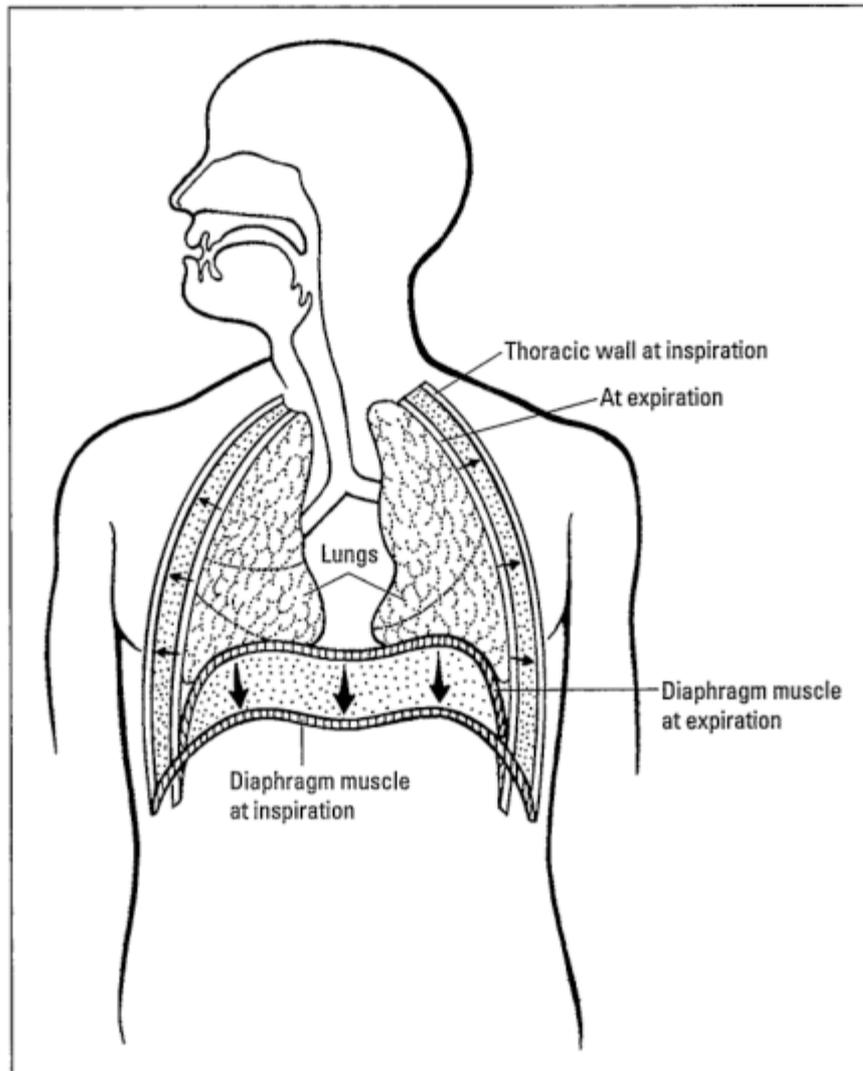
Most people walk around not actually breathing much. People tend to use only a tiny percentage of their lung capacity, just like they use only a tiny percentage of their brain capacity. Proper breathing changes that.



While receiving a massage, focus your mind as fully as possible upon the very important act of breathing. Focusing your mind on your breath brings your awareness back to your body quicker than anything else.

## Going with the diaphragm's flow

The *diaphragm* is a muscle in your abdomen — it looks like a soft pizza shaped into a double-headed dome — that is responsible for keeping you breathing (see Figure 7-1). Most of the time, your diaphragm is contracting and relaxing without conscious thought from you, but you can teach yourself to control this activity. In the section “Exercising your breathing muscle’s breath,” I give you an exercise that helps you use this muscle more consciously, which enables you to exert more control over your breathing, making it fuller and deeper.



**Figure 7-1:**  
The  
diaphragm  
and other  
elements  
of your  
respiratory  
system.

## *Exercising your breathing muscles*

The next time you have the chance, spend a few minutes observing a sleeping — or at least relaxed — infant or toddler breathe. Pay close attention to the abdomen, and you can see the entire area gently lift and lower. This movement is the result of an active, uninhibited diaphragm at work.

Then look down at your own abdomen while you breathe for a few minutes. Notice a difference? Where did all the lifting and lowering go? You still have the same breathing mechanisms you always did; they're not something you grow out of. With each breath you take, you should indeed have a visibly rhythmical, moving body. Somewhere along the line, though, most people stifle themselves into taking shallow, insufficient breaths. This type of breathing is a common reaction to the act of growing older. Don't worry, you're still getting enough oxygen to survive. But, are you getting enough to thrive? By practicing deep breathing during massage, you can literally rejuvenate your body, sending extra-oxygenated blood out all the way to your toes.

The key to breathing properly while getting a massage is to take *whole breaths*, a term that basically means "breathing like a kid." Go ahead and try a whole breath now. Lie down on your back, placing your palms gently on your abdomen, and then begin this four-step process:

**1. Breathe deep and low into your lungs so that your abdomen pushes your hands upward.**

Make sure that you're not just pushing up with your stomach muscles, but that you're actually expanding the entire abdominal area.

**2. Continue the expansion up into your ribs, allowing them to push outward toward each side.**

**3. When your ribs have expanded *out* as far as they'll go, then expand them *up* toward your head, taking the last bit of breath into the area just beneath your collar bones.**

**4. Let the whole thing collapse.**

You don't need to try and push the air out; just let it flow. When your lungs feel empty and your abdomen is flat once again, you can restart the process.

## *Rule #2: Stay Loose*

As you probably know, one of the main points of getting a massage is to relax. Logically, you may then think that you can just give your body to a massage therapist who will relax your body for you, like giving your car to a mechanic and expecting him to fix it.

### Please release me, let me go . . .

After you receive several massages, you'll gradually become accustomed to relaxing your own muscles. Eventually you notice that you can do the same thing even when you're not receiving a massage, like when you're waiting in line at the grocery store, stuck in traffic, or sitting in a meeting with your boss. "Twang," will go one of

your muscle fibers, and you'll feel it beginning to tighten up. Then, silently, without anyone noticing, you send a mental message to the growing knot, telling it to go away, in the same way that your massage therapist helps you do during a massage. You can take this side benefit of massage with you wherever you go.

Expecting a massage therapist to do all your body's relaxing is called *giving up responsibility for your own relaxation*, and it's a no-no. Staying loose is your responsibility; the massage therapist can help you, but you basically have to do the relaxing yourself. So how do you do that?

You accomplish relaxation by becoming more aware of what you're feeling in your own body. During the massage, your massage therapist often reminds you to focus on "knots" or tight areas. In those moments, using the power of your own imagination, you can begin to visualize what those knots may look like in your muscles, and to let go of them.

If you're not staying loose by engaging your mind to relax your own muscles, you're missing more than half the benefits and effects of the massage.

## Rule #3: Let Go

When you receive a massage, especially the first time, you may have a tendency — like just about everyone else in the world — to "help" the person working on you. You may graciously lift your limbs, hold your head up, and twist your body around, all to make things easier for the other person. Although this "helping" may seem like the friendliest thing to do, you're actually hindering the massage process and making your massage therapist's job a little more difficult. Relaxing a person who is holding her own arm up in the air as stiff as a flag pole is pretty darn hard.

The technical term for this tendency during massage is *hanging on*, and you want to do exactly the opposite, which is letting go. But what, exactly, does "letting go" mean?

## The limp-arm experiment

You're basically hanging onto yourself for dear life, even the parts of your body that are painful, stiff, or tense. This hanging on is a natural tendency, but to get the most out of a massage, you have to let go. The "limp-arm experiment" is an easy way to begin training yourself to let go. All you need is a partner and someplace comfortable to lie down.

**1. Lie down on your back and have your partner lift your arm up in the air several inches.**

**2. After a few seconds, have your partner let go of your arm without any warning to you.**

Let your arm drop back down. (Make sure that you're lying on a soft surface.)

**3. Watch to see whether your arm pllops back down, limp as a noodle, or whether you hold it right where she left it, stiff as a board.**

What do you have to do to let your arm drop back down? What thought process do you

have to go through? What mental image? What body sensation?

**4. Tell your partner to lift your arm a little higher each time.**

Instead of dropping your arm all the way back down, tell her to catch it in her other hand.

**5. Keep repeating this exercise until your arm completely lets go and your partner can drop it from any height with absolutely no resistance.**

This ability may come naturally to you the very first time you try to let go, but normally the exercise takes quite a bit of conscious effort. You may not be able to let go until you make several separate attempts on different days. After you master one arm, you can try the other arm, a leg, or your head.

Use this newly formed skill to let go the next time you receive a massage.



If you were to take a microscope and look deep within your muscles and joints while you're getting a massage, you'd discover some specialized nerve cells that monitor the position and relative movement of your body. These cells are called *proprioceptors* (see Chapter 4).

These cells constantly tell you where you are in space, something everybody likes to have a pretty firm control over all of the time, even while asleep. These cells keep you from just rolling right out of bed every night.

About the only time you completely let go of all your holding patterns, tensions, and proprioceptive rigidities is when you're under deep anesthesia. Under anesthesia, people sometimes release the tension they normally think of as "built-in" through age or heredity, including stooped shoulders, stiff hips, ugly grimaces, and more. When they come out of anesthesia, they reclaim these habitual patterns almost instantaneously. They can't sustain the relaxation because it's unconscious. Massage, conversely, allows people to achieve a conscious relaxation, which can last indefinitely.



One of my clients suffered for years from debilitating pain due to whiplash. Then one day she received a massage from a woman at Gurney's Inn, a spa in Montauk, New York. After that massage, the pain was almost entirely gone, and it continued to gradually fade away. My client was able to make such a drastic change by letting herself go fully into the healing hands of the massage therapist. When she did, she stopped holding onto the same painful, habitual patterns that had formed in her body since the accident.

## ***Rule #4: Stop Thinking, Start Being***

The problem with your mind is that it just works too darn well, thinking and thinking and thinking without stopping all day long from the first moment you wake up until well after your head hits the pillow. This feature is fine during most of your daily activities, but when it comes to getting a massage, too much thinking is definitely a drawback.

Many people get a massage and then ten minutes later can barely remember it because they weren't really paying attention to it while it was happening. Instead, an ongoing stream of thoughts kept them from fully experiencing the massage.

When you're getting a massage, don't think about what you should have done the day before or what you plan to do an hour later. A massage is time to Be Here Now. The sensations you're feeling offer a great opportunity to quiet your mind, focus, and think of nothing else for a little while. In this way, every massage is a potential meditation. Don't get me wrong: relaxing and joking around during a massage is perfectly okay, too, but most people, at least once in a while, can benefit from a *massage meditation*. (See the sidebar, "A massage meditation," later in this chapter.)

## ***Rule #5: No Pain, No Gain? No Way!***

You may have heard of the massage-masochists who don't believe they're receiving a real massage unless they have to grit their teeth to keep from screaming through the whole thing. They're the ones you can hear yelling from behind massage room doors, "More pressure! More pressure!"

This green-beret school of massage is an unfortunate result of the "no-pain, no-gain" mentality that military academies, full-contact sports enthusiasts, and certain daytime-television talk show hosts foster. You don't need to buy into this way of thinking, and you shouldn't let this attitude scare you away from getting a massage.

## A massage meditation

Meditation, in a nutshell, is the act of focusing your entire attention on just one thing, thus stopping the constant chatter inside your head and experiencing a state of timelessness, contentment, and wholeness. People achieve this state in many ways — through sports, or silence, or prayer, for example — and massage is yet another activity that you can use to effectively shut out the rest of the world and tune into your own inner peace. The next time you receive a massage, try this meditation . . .

- 1. Close your eyes and begin to get in touch with your breath, as I describe in the section "Rule #1: Keep Breathing."**

Before you receive the first touch of the massage, spend several minutes trying to clear your mind of any other thoughts. Concentrate only on your breathing.

- 2. When your massage therapist first makes contact, imagine yourself breathing in through that very spot.**

For example, if she starts by massaging your neck, imagine a stream of fresh oxygen and energy entering through your neck, exactly where her fingers are.

- 3. On the exhalation, imagine your muscles in that same area becoming softer, warmer, and looser.**

- 4. Continue with this awareness — breathing relaxation into each successive point that the massage therapist is touching.**

Eventually, you become aware that the massage therapist is tuning in to your breath as well, and the massage becomes a shared meditation.

- 5. Communicate with your massage therapist, both verbally and nonverbally. Together, you can create a special massage mood that will help you focus on your experience, making the massage more like a meditation (see Chapter 9).**

- 6. Keep bringing your mind back to the massage.**

You may realize, at various points during the massage, that your mind has wandered off on some train of thought. This is completely natural and happens even to advanced meditation practitioners. Simply bring your mind gently back to the breath and the relaxation. Don't worry about how "good" you are at meditation. See *Meditation For Dummies* (IDG Books Worldwide) for more guidance and tips about meditation.

So, how much pain should you experience during a massage? In my opinion, none. Zero. However, the line is indeed thin between the pleasure you receive during massage and a certain kind of therapeutic pain. Some people like to walk that line while they're getting a massage. If you want to experiment walking this line yourself, make sure to do so with an experienced professional.

Although certain muscle knots and patterns of tension do respond well to firm, well-focused pressure, you don't necessarily need to experience it for yourself. Harder massage is not always better massage, and at times the lightest touch can achieve the most profound benefits.

## Rule #6: Listen to Your Emotions

Don't be surprised if during a massage one day you suddenly, for no reason at all, feel like crying your eyes out, or laughing hysterically. Massage sometimes has that effect on people. Some of the reasons for this emotional response include:

- ✓ Certain emotional memories — usually the result of powerful experiences — can resurface when your body is massaged.
- ✓ No one has touched you with care, compassion, and gentleness for a very long time. In that case, the experience suddenly overwhelms you with gratitude, bringing forth tears.
- ✓ You're a very ticklish person.

As esoteric as the first two explanations may sound, they're entirely plausible. In fact, certain types of massage are famous for stirring up emotions. Rolfing, for instance, often triggers this type of experience. The explanation for this emotional component of massage is straightforward — your body and mind have faithfully recorded your every experience, but some of these experiences were so unpleasant that you filed them away in your unconscious and shut down certain feelings in the corresponding part of your body. Massaging the affected areas can bring your awareness back to your body, thus unlocking the memories.



If you encounter one of these emotional peaks yourself during a massage, relax, breathe, and allow it to happen. Remembering that you are safe in your present environment, let your mind drift to whatever images or memories seem to be surfacing. You may find yourself remembering all sorts of things that you hadn't thought of for years, and you can benefit from letting the attendant emotions flow freely through your body, without trying to stifle them. Professional massage therapists are accustomed to this type of emotional release and know how to make you feel comfortable while it's happening. There's no need to feel embarrassed by the experience.



If, as occasionally happens, one of these resurfacing memories is particularly traumatic, as in the case of abuse, do whatever is necessary to comfort yourself. Communicate with the person massaging you, letting her know that you need to sit up again, or get wrapped in a blanket for a feeling of safety. Have some tissues nearby to dry away tears. Later you can decide whether you want to pursue these memories further with the guidance of a psychologist or other counselor.

## Rule #7: *Blissing Out Is Okay*

Sometimes, massage doesn't just make you feel great; it makes you feel ecstatic, rapturous, and filled with bliss. The feeling is visceral. You're lying there one minute relaxing, hopefully concentrating on your breathing, but perhaps just going over your grocery list in your head, when KABOOM!, it hits you, and suddenly you're just floating there in a syrupy sea of endorphins, not knowing what to do with yourself.

I can tell you what to do: enjoy this feeling while it lasts, because, like every other human experience, it passes.

These experiences are different for everyone, and nobody knows exactly what causes them. They've been responsible for many people changing their entire lives and heading into a career as a massage therapist. And people with spiritual inclinations, once touched in this fashion, have created entire ministries devoted to the "laying on of hands."



A minister named Zach Thomas from North Carolina once had such a powerful experience receiving a massage that he went on to become a massage therapist himself. At first, his church was opposed to his hands-on work, and Zach had to practice massage privately. Eventually, though, he took his skills and his compassionate touch out to the public, performing massage for dying people in hospices and hospitals. He helped form a group called the National Association of Bodywork in Religious Services (NABRS), which is active today with hundreds of members. Much of the work the members of this association do is for those people who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford it. The nuns and priests and other clergy involved practice the actual "laying on of hands" as written about in the Bible. For more information, you can write to the organization at 337 Tranquil Avenue, Charlotte, NC 28209.

The spiritual secret behind massage? Simple. What massage really boils down to is two people just being together fully in the present moment, which has been the essence of spiritual traditions forever, especially in the East. The mystical traditions of the West have expressed similar sentiments, as noted in the phrase, "Be still and know that I am God." These understandings are mystical in nature, not reserved for any one particular religion.

Think of it this way — massage is one sure-fire way to follow the Golden Rule that exists in almost all cultures and every religion, from the Good Samaritan to the compassionate Buddha. *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.* Well, who doesn't want to be touched with care and compassion? Who doesn't like others to help them feel better and lighten their load?

Massage is compassion turned into action.

## ***Rule #8: It's Cool to Be Nude (Or Not)***

You are, whether you like it or not, naked all the time beneath your clothes. You were born nude, just like every other human on the planet. Nudity is natural. However, each culture develops its own peculiar attitudes about nudity, ranging from those who consider it extremely awkward, embarrassing, and inappropriate at all times to those who don't think twice about it, anytime, anywhere, for any reason.

Neither attitude is healthier than the other, they're just different. The key for massage situations is to respect the attitudes of both people at all times. If either the person receiving or giving the massage is uncomfortable with any kind of skin exposure whatsoever, you're much better off to cover that area up and keep it covered than to cause discomfort. This applies to the entire body, even the legs and arms, which most people are comfortable exposing. Although gliding an oiled palm is definitely easier over bare skin than covered skin, massage has other moves besides gliding, and you can give a very good massage to a fully clothed person (I show you how in Chapter 11).



Remember this message: When you receive a massage, you're okay the way you are — nude or totally covered up. Just be comfortable.

## ***Rule #9: You're the Boss***

Even though you're lying down with your eyes closed during most massages, you're still in charge. With the slightest word or gesture, you can change the course of the proceedings. Deeper pressure? It's up to you. Slower pace? That's your call, too. Less chit-chat? Your decision.

You have complete authority to change anything that may be making you uncomfortable. Requesting a change of music, for example, is perfectly permissible, as is turning the music off altogether. If you want to be covered more modestly, just ask. Whatever you say goes. You can say exactly what you're feeling, even ending the massage at any time, for any reason you want. Period. You always have the option of standing up and saying, "Enough!"

Of course, when you're receiving a massage from a professional massage therapist, it makes sense to listen to her suggestions. If she thinks you should quiet down and focus on the massage rather than conversation, for example, it's probably best to follow her advice. However, don't mistakenly place yourself in a submissive role just because you're lying down. Even if the other person knows more about massage than you, is older than you, or has a louder personality than you, the bottom line is, when you're receiving a massage, you're the boss.

## ***Rule #10: Be Grateful***

During the massage itself, spend some time being grateful for what you're experiencing in the moment. This course is by far the best one to take, instead of the alternatives, which consist of

- ✓ Wondering when the massage is going to end
- ✓ Plotting the next time you can get a massage
- ✓ Planning your next business trip
- ✓ Worrying about the world economy

Also, be sure to share your feelings of gratitude with the person who just gave you the massage, being especially vocal about her fantastic skills and techniques. That way, she'll look forward to giving you your next massage as much as you'll look forward to getting it.

## Chapter 8

# Your First Massage Appointment — Step-by-Step



### *In This Chapter*

- ▷ Walking through your first appointment
- ▷ Where to go to get a massage



**P**robably the biggest barrier that stops people from ever signing up for their first professional massage is a fear of the unknown. Let's face it: If you have never ventured into a room with a stranger to get rubbed before, you just don't know what to expect, and the thought of becoming vulnerable in any way doesn't inspire you to take the first step.

But hold on. Think back for just a minute. Do you remember any experience in your entire life that was *not* scary the first time you tried it? Go as far back as your first day at kindergarten. *That's* scary. Getting your first massage is just another step along the road of discovery in your life.

## *Your First Appointment with a Pro*

You can use the following seven steps as a guide to help you breeze through your first appointment with confidence and poise, starting before you even arrive and lasting right up until you walk out the door.

### *Preparation*

In order to get the most out of your massage, you have to do a little more planning and preparation than you would, say, in order to go get a haircut. When you schedule your massage, keep these points in mind:

- ✓ Don't eat a large meal within a couple hours before starting the massage. You don't want to be lying face down on a belly full of lasagna while somebody is pressing on your back. Light meals and snacks are okay, and a larger meal several hours earlier won't affect you.
- ✓ If possible, don't wear a lot of jewelry, which takes a lot of time to take off and put back on again.
- ✓ Refrain from consuming alcohol before your massage (unless it's a sensual massage and you're sharing a bottle of bubbly with that special someone to get in the mood). Although alcohol can help relax you, it also slows your responses and deadens some sensations. You want to be alert and responsive because massage is a two-way dance and you need to do your part.
- ✓ Make sure to schedule enough time before and after your massage so you're not rushing to get there and flying out the door when you leave. Hurrying tends to counteract the relaxing effects of the massage itself.
- ✓ Turn off pagers and cellular phones during the massage. This probably seems obvious, but it may surprise you to know that beeps, buzzes, and rings have interrupted many tranquil, soothing massages.
- ✓ Make sure any childcare details are completely taken care of before you begin so your mind can be at ease during your session.

No particular time of day is best to receive a massage, but most people have their own personal preference. Some like the morning so they can experience the benefits throughout the day, and others like a massage right before going to bed at night. Whichever your choice is, try to schedule far enough in advance so you get the time you prefer. Many massage therapists are busy, and their "prime times" are taken up early.

## ***Communication***

When you arrive at your massage destination, especially for the first time, you need to engage in a little communication with the person who is going to massage you. So it helps, of course, if you speak the same language as that person. And I don't mean just the same native tongue, but the same *intention*, too. If what you want out of the experience is fundamentally different than what the massage therapist intends to give, you're headed for trouble.

For example, if you came in for an hour of blissful relaxation and escape from stress, but what the massage therapist intends on giving you is a session of active, muscle-stretching sports therapy, neither one of you is going to have a good time. The best time to confirm your intentions is on the phone, before you meet face-to-face, but you need to reconfirm this understanding with some clear verbal communication after you arrive, as well.

When you finally meet your massage therapist for the first time, there may be some nonverbal communication required also, in the form of paperwork to fill out, like the actual massage therapist's intake form. "Why do I have to fill out these medical forms if all I want is a simple massage?" you may ask. Well, it's for your own good. Massage affects the entire body, and it's best if your massage therapist knows as much as possible about your health history. If a massage therapist doesn't ask you to fill out a form, however, it doesn't mean she doesn't care about your health; that's just her style, or the policy of the spa or health club where she works.

Another type of communication you share with your massage therapist is both nonverbal and non-written — body language. Your massage therapist, by profession an expert in the language of the body, may try her best not to laugh out loud while your body silently struggles with embarrassment and anxiety at the prospect of getting your first massage. Just kidding! Actually, as you may imagine, massage therapists become very adept at making their clients feel at ease in a potentially uneasy situation. It's the little things they do (and don't do) that make the difference. It could be where they point their eyes or how they manipulate sheets and towels to make you feel protected and respected. It's the way they just relax and accept you when you make yourself vulnerable by being there.

Besides, they're just as eager to make a good first impression as you are, partly because it's human nature and partly because they want you as a repeat customer!

## *Getting comfortable*

In most massage situations, after you arrive and go through your communication rituals, the next step is undressing and lying down. This can be tricky. It's the moment many people dread, and the one that keeps them from ever getting a "real" massage. The way it works is like this:

1. The massage therapist explains how you're supposed to get up on the massage table, pointing out where your head should be, and whether you should be face up or facedown. If you ask whether you should get completely undressed or not, the stock answer is something to the effect of, "Most people take all their clothes off, but you can get undressed to the level of your comfort." Then she leaves the room. Do not feel intimidated by "most people" who all so bravely get naked for their massages. It's up to you if you want to keep your underwear or some clothes on, and it's OK either way. Refer to Rule # 8 in Chapter 7, "It's cool to be nude (or not)."
2. After the massage therapist is out of the room, remember to take your time. Don't worry about getting barged in on, cause it ain't gonna happen. She knocks before coming back in, and usually she waits much longer than necessary to make sure you have plenty of time. Take this opportunity to remove jewelry, watches, and anything else that may

entangle a finger (wedding bands are okay). Usually, there is a little table or shelf to hold your belongings, and you can find a hook for your clothes. If you have long hair, you may want to tie it back so it doesn't get in the way. Also, it's a good idea to visit the bathroom *before* you lay down on the table, even if you don't think you have to go. Getting a massage with a full bladder takes a lot of the enjoyment out of it.

3. Lie down on the table in the position you were told and pull the sheet or towel up over your body, completely covering yourself.
4. The massage therapist knocks and asks if it's okay to enter again. When you give the go-ahead, she comes in, and then usually washes her hands. She does this for three reasons:
  - To reassure you that her hands are clean
  - To wash away any dirt or germs she may have contacted since scrubbing them the last time a few minutes earlier
  - In many areas the law requires it
5. She makes sure you're comfortable, checking the room temperature, tucking the towel around your body, and adjusting the lights and music. She may also slip a little pillow or piece of foam rubber beneath your knees, ankles, or head to help support you. These cushions are called *bolsters*, and they really help you feel more comfortable. If you feel a strain or lack of support in any area of your body, just let the massage therapist know.
6. After everything's set, your massage therapist uncovers just the area that she is going to work on. If she plans to massage your neck, she pulls the sheet down to the top of your chest. Massage therapists always leave women's breasts covered, and no one's "private parts" ever get exposed.



Sometimes no matter how hard you try, all these massage rules go out the window. Like the time I was working at a spa and had the opportunity to massage Dr. Ruth Westheimer. I'll never forget the experience because, for one thing, she threw her robe off before I ever had the chance to leave the room and let her get undressed. Then, full of confidence, she strode to the massage table and tried to climb aboard. I say "tried" because, as it turns out, she was a little too short to reach. I wanted to reach down and give her a boost, but I couldn't figure out how to do it without getting a little too personal with Dr. Ruth, so I averted my eyes as best I could and offered ineffectual words of general encouragement.

Luckily, she knew what to do. "Don't worry!" she chimed. "I've had this problem before!" Then she proceeded to push a chair up next to the massage table, climb onto it, and from there crawl up onto the table, where I immediately covered her with a sheet in the proper professional fashion.

## Avoiding the bathrobe dance

As a massage therapist in spas, on many occasions I've entered the massage room to begin a massage only to find my client lying there, face down, rigid with nervousness, with her bathrobe tied super-tight around her waist. Before leaving the room to let her disrobe, I'd instructed her to take her robe off and lie down under the sheet I'd provided, but some clients are too tense to hear those instructions.

And so that's when we begin the bathrobe dance.

The bathrobe dance is an awkward ordeal that usually lasts about two minutes. While the massage therapist tries to assist as best he can, the client rolls, wriggles, and writhes her way out of

the bathrobe while remaining face down and completely covered at all times. The client's rump usually scoots up in the air, arms and legs splay every which way, and her face turns bright red.

Then, after the robe is finally loosened from around her body and her arms are out of the armholes, the massage therapist has to drape a sheet or towel over it before skillfully slipping the robe from underneath. This entire procedure leaves the client even more tense than when she started, and more embarrassed than she would have been if she'd simply listened to the instructions.



TIP

If you find yourself on the table still wrapped in your robe, make things easy on yourself. Don't wear yourself out before the massage by wrestling with your robe. Instead, say something like, "That was so silly of me," and ask the massage therapist to leave the room again to give you another chance. Then get off the table, slip out of your robe, and lie down beneath the sheet like you were supposed to in the first place.



TIP

If, rather than a bathrobe, you have a towel wrapped around you before the massage, make sure not to lie down directly upon the knotted part so you have to do the "rock-n-roll" to loosen it. Instead, open the towel up and lie straight on the table with the towel still covering your backside.

## The first touch

The very first moment of contact between you and the massage therapist can tell you an awful lot about how the rest of the massage is going to feel. Each massage therapist has a "personality" in her hands that you quickly get to know.

When the massage therapist is closely attuned to you and your body, this moment can be almost sacred. It's an intimate joining-together of your consciousness with the consciousness of another person, which just plain doesn't happen that often in the modern world.

Take advantage of this initial contact by tuning in especially closely to what's happening in your own body. In the same way that you pick up a lot of information about the person who's touching you, she's picking up a lot of information about you. It's a good opportunity for you to concentrate on your breathing and relaxation.

## During the massage



During the massage, your massage therapist continues to keep you covered at all times, only exposing those areas that she's working on at the moment. Massage therapists are experts at this technique, called *draping*, and they make you feel completely comfortable, almost as if you were fully dressed during the experience.

Yes, you are comfortable and modestly covered the whole time, but what are you supposed to actually DO while you're getting a massage? That's the biggest problem many people have, especially "type A" people. They figure that getting a massage is just plain boring and that's why they decide not to do it.

Okay, so getting a massage is not exactly the same as bungee jumping from a hot-air balloon, attending a rock concert, or brokering a multi-million dollar deal in a corporate boardroom. But if you let it, massage can become compelling, thrilling even, in a very internal kind of way. It's like taking a roller coaster ride inside your own skin.

The trick is not to try and make anything happen, but to just let whatever happens happen. You're not supposed to do anything. Your massage therapist tells you if you have to move a certain way or breathe a certain way or visualize a certain image. Besides that, the less you do the better. Think of massage as a trip to the beach. You're *supposed* to just lie there and do nothing.

"But what if I fall asleep?" you gasp. "Wouldn't that insult the massage therapist?" Not at all. In fact, some massage therapists take it as a compliment that they can get their clients to relax this deeply. However, your creative input to the massage process is just as valuable as the massage therapist's input, so it's better if you stay awake. And, if you snooze through a massage, you may be missing some of the most pleasurable moments of your life. Who wants to pay good money for a nap?



If you're the type that cannot conceive of an entire hour spent doing nothing, try this: Talk to the massage therapist about things that matter, like your health. Most massage people are pretty well versed in the art of taking-care-of-yourself, and you stand a good chance of having a conversation that goes beyond mere chitchat, offering you some real benefits.

## Under pressure

So, what's the right amount of *pressure* to ask for during a massage anyway? Pressure refers to how hard or soft the massage feels, how painful or soothing. Usually, your massage therapist has a lot of experience in this area and can find just the right pressure to suit your particular body type and your level of sensitivity. But there may be times when you want her to change the pressure, and it helps if you know what to ask for.

It's silly to suffer through a massage that's too soft or too hard just because you're too bashful to say anything about it. You can use this scale from 1–10 to communicate your desired pressure level to your massage therapist:

- 1 **Light as a feather.** The fingertips merely skim over the surface of the skin to provide stimulation to the nerve endings, but no pressure is exerted onto the body.
- 2–3 **Very light to light.** Many people prefer this kind of silky, gliding touch, but it drives others crazy because they think the massage therapist isn't "getting in there and working the muscles."
- 4–6 **Moderate to moderately firm.** This is where most massage takes place. You can definitely feel some pressure, and you know the massage is having some definite physical effects, but never so much that it's annoying.
- 7–9 **Firm to very firm to deep.** At these levels, you may begin to squirm a little. And you may even say something like, "What are you trying to do, kill me?" Rest assured, the massage therapist is not trying to kill you. She's just being merciless in her attempt to root out and destroy any tightness she's found. Mercilessness can be a good quality in a massage therapist.
- 10 **Profoundly deep massage.** This level reaches to the core of your body's deeper structures, actually altering your posture and inner alignment. This should be reserved for masochists, people with a high pain tolerance, and those who know what they're doing.



If there is a distraction of some sort, such as a loud noise or a telephone ringing, try not to take it personally. Nobody is out to ruin your massage experience. Instead of letting an interruption spoil things for you, focus instead on the exchange of positive energy between you and the person giving you the massage.

Keep communicating. When appropriate during the massage, give feedback to your massage therapist. Words spoken about the massage help keep you focused on the massage. If at any point you want the massage therapist to change what she's doing, you have a right to let her know. After all, you're paying, and the customer is always right. Let her know what you want, which may include:

- ▮ More pressure or less pressure. This is often referred to on a scale from 1 to 10 (see the sidebar, "Under pressure" in this chapter).

- ✓ More or less time spent in a particular area. But be aware that the massage therapist may be using her knowledge to achieve a certain goal, working in the area that's most effective, even if you think it's not directly connected to your problem.
- ✓ A glass of water.
- ✓ A trip to the bathroom.
- ✓ A chance to express your feelings and ask for reassurance, especially if a strong emotion begins to surface during your massage.



Beware of the massage therapist who claims she can only perform “deep” work and then proceeds to pummel your body even after you request lighter pressure. It's never necessary to undergo a painful ordeal in order to experience the relaxation you seek.

## *Coming back slowly*

Take it easy getting off the table and back into your life. There's no need to hurry. In fact, most massage therapists suggest that you just lay there and absorb the effects of the massage and the relaxation for a few minutes before getting up again. Unless you're late for something urgent, such as an international plane trip to go receive the Nobel Prize at an awards banquet being held in your honor, follow this suggestion. These few minutes can be an exquisite interlude during which your cares and concerns seem a million miles away. Relish it.

Then, when you finally decide to get up, don't be shy about asking for help if you need it, as you may feel a little wobbly at first.

There is a special way to get yourself off a massage table that helps you keep the effects intact. Instead of essentially doing a sit-up and re-tensing all your muscles in order to get upright again, simply roll onto your side and push gently against the table with both hands while you slowly roll back into a sitting position. Your feet and legs will end up hanging over the edge of the table, as you see illustrated in Figure 8-1. Then you can slide your rear-end off the table like a buttered pancake.

## *Afterglow*



When you first step on the floor again, exercise caution because massage oil left on the soles of your feet can cause you to slip. Take your time getting dressed, making sure you're not forgetting anything. It's not necessary to take a shower, as your skin absorbs normal amounts of oil or cream, though you

may want to take one if you're going out later. If the massage therapist used excess oil, you can wipe it off with a towel or some rubbing alcohol before putting clothes back on, especially silk garments.

**Figure 8-1:**  
There's a  
right way  
and a wrong  
way to get  
off a mas-  
sage table.  
This is the  
right way.



Take some time to reorient yourself. Be cautious about driving your car right away as you may feel a bit “disconnected,” as if your body were inside of a big box filled with cotton.

Before you leave, take the massage therapist's business card, and consider making another appointment so you don't have to worry about it later.

### *To tip or not to tip*

You're all ready to head out the door when suddenly it occurs to you that perhaps you should tip the person who just gave you the massage. Is it appropriate? Would she be insulted if you gave her a tip? Upset if you didn't? The answer is . . . “it depends.”

It depends upon where you received the massage. Was it a spa? Then a tip is almost always expected, unless the spa has a policy against it. Was it at a sports medicine clinic? Then tips are not usually part of the procedure. Did you receive the massage at home? Then a tip is definitely appreciated, as the massage therapist went out of her way to provide the service.



### Overcoming the heebie jeebies

If, even after trying some of the suggestions in this chapter, you're still harboring a tiny bit of fear and loathing about massage somewhere in your subconscious mind, that's all right. I felt the same way, too, the first time I disrobed for a session as a student at the Massage School of Santa Monica many years ago.

It's perfectly natural to feel somewhat anxious at the thought of somebody you don't even know touching you for an extended period of time. And the thought of somebody you *do* know touching you for a whole hour may even be worse! In the highly sophisticated, jet-setter

world of massage therapy, these feelings of anxiety are known by the technical term "heebie-jeebies." Unless you grew up in a household where massage was as common as Saturday morning cartoons, the heebie-jeebies may present a problem when you're first getting ready to climb up on a massage table and simply *receive*.

My advice? Feel the fear and do it anyway. Plunge in and get that massage. Afterwards, if you're like 99.9 percent of all people, you say to yourself, "That wasn't so bad! Why didn't I do this a long time ago?"

Some massage therapists feel tipping for a massage is inappropriate. They want their work to be considered in the same category as any other health care provider's. You wouldn't tip your chiropractor, your homeopath, or your M.D., right?



So how do you know what to do? Tipping ultimately boils down to an understanding with the massage therapist. If you're at all uncertain, simply ask, "Is tipping allowed here?" The customary tip amount in most locations is usually in the \$5–\$10 range, more if the massage therapist is working late, went far out of her way, or did an especially good job. And, remember, you never *have* to tip for massage. It's not like tipping a waiter, who's making the bulk of his income through gratuities. Massage therapists are usually pretty well paid for what they do. Tips are the icing on the cake for them.

## Where to Go to Get Massaged

You have an array of choices when it comes to where you receive a professional massage, ranging from right in your own bedroom all the way up to super luxurious spa resorts on the island of Maui. I personally recommend Maui. Wherever you are, it helps if you know a little bit about each environment and what you can expect when you receive a massage there. That's what this section's all about.

## *Your own home*

Getting a professional massage in your own home is great. In fact, some people think it's the *crème de la crème* of massage experiences. You don't have to drive anywhere. You're in safe, familiar surroundings. And, best of all, afterwards all you have to do is roll over into your own bed or onto your own couch. The massage therapist leaves, and you float off on a wave of bliss in the comfort of your own home.

What could be better?

However, there are some downsides to the in-home massage visit. For one thing, you're basically inviting a stranger to set up her business right in your own bedroom or your den, which is kind of an invasion of privacy. And another thing — when you're at home, you're surrounded by your own life. Every detail is there to remind you of your pre and post-massage existence, which may perhaps detract from the "escape" factor of your experience.

Then there are the distractions. If you have children, you can pretty much count on them wanting to crawl up on the massage table with you and "help" the nice massage person do her job. This is very endearing of the little tykes, but it's not the straight and narrow road to total relaxation.



Only sign up for an in-home massage if you're comfortable with other people in your private space and you can keep distractions to a minimum.

## *The massage therapist's home*

Many massage therapists have a space set up in their own homes for giving massage. This can range from a dinky little corner in one end of the living room to an entire suite of offices with a separate entrance. You may like the "personalized" feeling of visiting a massage therapist in her home, where you can take advantage of the relaxing environment she has (hopefully) set up. On the other hand, if you're the type of person who prefers a more clearly defined edge between the personal and professional aspects of your transactions, the massage therapist's home may not be the best choice of location for you.

Also, you have to take into account certain practical details as well, such as whether or not the massage therapist has pets. If you're allergic to cats, and the massage therapist's house is a veritable kitty kennel, you may break out in a rash and not enjoy the massage at all.

A good massage therapist should put the rest of her life on hold while you're in her home, but some have a tendency to attend to their own business while you're there, answering the phone and the doorbell, for instance, which can

greatly detract from your experience. You may need to make an extra effort to enforce rule # 9 from Chapter 7. You're the boss, even if you're in her home, and for this hour you're in charge.

## Spas

Some of the most beautiful massage environments in the world can be found in spas, and you find out more about them in Chapter 15. Grand *destination spas* dot the map in every state now, and if you look in your Yellow Pages, you're likely to find a *day spa* that you can check out right in your own town.

While spas are often pleasant and luxurious, there are a couple things you should keep in mind when signing up for a massage in one:

- ✔ Massage therapists in spas only keep a (usually small) percentage of the profits, which sometimes leads them to give less than their absolute best work.
- ✔ Massage Therapists in spas are "on the clock," and you're likely to get a massage that is exactly 50 minutes long, so she has time to prepare the room for the next client. It's a rare massage therapist who can still give you a feeling of timeless bliss within that shortened hour.
- ✔ Often, the style of massage given in spas is dictated by a lowest-common-denominator mentality, and massage therapists are not allowed to use their advanced techniques for fear of alienating a clientele who wants "just a rubdown."



These warnings notwithstanding, there's no reason to believe you won't receive an incredible massage in a spa. Some of the best massage therapists work in them. Also, if you end up finding a massage therapist you really like, you can ask her whether she also takes private clients outside the spa, which may mean a better deal for her and a better massage for you. Be diplomatic when doing this though, as many spas have a policy against their massage therapists "stealing" customers in this way.

## Cruise ships

Cruise ships are fun places to get massages, if you don't mind rocking back and forth a little bit while you're on the table. Almost every ship has its own spa, and you can visit for a half-hour or an hour of massage as easily as visiting the midnight buffet. A massage during your cruise may add to the exotic flavor of your trip, but there are a couple less-than-exotic points to keep in mind as well:

- ✓ Because floor space and portholes are at a premium on ships, massage rooms onboard are usually teeny tiny little quarters with no natural light. If you're used to ample luxurious massage spaces, you may feel a little claustrophobic in this environment.
- ✓ Even more so than in spas on land, shipboard massage therapists are part of a massage assembly line, and sometimes the massages are limited to half an hour. It's rough to coax the best from your massage therapist because she sees so many people come and go — none of whom are repeat customers.
- ✓ Make sure to sign up early — as soon as you come on board — if you're thinking about getting a massage during your cruise because the best time slots fill up fast. You may want an appointment during a "sea day," rather than in port, so you don't have to decide between getting a massage and going ashore to sightsee or shop.

## Hotels



Many hotels have their own spas, so all you have to do to book a massage is call the spa desk. For those hotels without a spa, you'll want to contact the concierge to arrange your appointment.

One note about concierges: Watch out! They often take a good chunk of the massage therapist's fee for themselves, and they have a stable of ever-ready massage therapists at hand who allow them to do that. So, the quality is not always the best. You may be better off placing a call directly to a professional that you find listed under licensed practitioners in the local Yellow Pages or newspaper. That way you can avoid the fee and perhaps find higher-quality work as well.

All in all, hotel rooms are on the low end of the totem pole as far as receiving massages go. They're impersonal, they're cramped, and they often have that funny hotel-room-smell that no amount of incense or positive thinking can overcome. If you find yourself in a hotel room somewhere with nowhere else to go for your massage, and only a concierge to put your trust in, do what seasoned massage recipients the world over have done for years: enjoy it anyway. (See Chapter 17 for more info about hotel massages.)

## Health clubs

Health clubs are becoming better places to receive massages. In the past, you were likely to wind up in a tiny cinder-block cubicle vibrating with the sounds of music from the aerobics room next door. These days health-club owners are more aware that their customers want a little nook of tranquility, and a well-trained massage therapist, available for massage. Depending upon the place, some of these clubs offer massage therapists a good percentage of the

profits, and even a chance to run their own concession, so you may very well find some motivated individuals. The massage is often high-quality, especially if you're interested in sports-related therapy. And in a health club you can receive your massage immediately after a strenuous workout and a limb-loosening sauna.

## *Clinics*

Many massage therapists open up their own clinics. The setup is similar to any other professional office, like a chiropractor's, a doctor's, or a dentist's. You walk in the front door into a waiting area with a potted plant, some magazines, chairs, and a reception desk. Behind the desk is a hallway with a few doors opening into rooms. The rooms behind those doors, however, can differ decidedly from other clinics. Depending upon the personality and style of the massage therapist, a massage treatment room can range from white-tiled sterility with anatomical charts on the walls to a softly glowing, plush chamber of warmth filled with the strains of celestial music.

One specialty in this area is known as the *sports massage clinic*. The massage therapists in these facilities concentrate on rehabilitating you after an injury. They often work with orthopedic physicians and physical therapists. A trip to this type of no-nonsense massage clinic may feel more like a hospital visit than a spa visit.

## *Student massage clinics*



Because of the wide disparity between massage therapists and the environments they create in which to work, it's a good idea to go check out each environment personally, or at least get a detailed description of it from a friend, *before* you sign up for your first massage there. That way you can avoid the nasty surprises that can surface, such as when you make an appointment at your local day spa for a relaxing hour of escape only to find the massage room is directly adjacent to a bank of two dozen noisy hair-drying machines.

# Part III

## The Art of Giving Massage

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I really don't think a simple neck massage is going to get rid of your headaches."

## *In this part . . .*

**Y**ou're no doubt familiar with the famous expression, "It's better to give than to receive." And if you're like most people, every time you've heard someone utter that wonderful phrase, filled as it is with such a beautiful philanthropic message, you've thought to yourself, "Yeah, right. I'll take receiving any day."

But you have to admit, there's a certain gratification that comes from giving which quite often actually makes it feel better than receiving — more meaningful, more fulfilling. And the secret to achieving that kind of fulfillment is that you have to give with your whole heart. It won't work if you're just going through the motions.

This is especially true for massage. Sure, you can rub some warmed almond oil on your partner's back for 20 minutes while watching the clock out with one eye and the football game on TV with the other, but that's not what massage is all about.

Massage is about cultivating the right attitude — the *giver's* attitude — not just applying mechanical maneuvers, which any massage text can teach you.

But don't worry: In this part of the book, you're going to discover how to actually give a massage, too! And as you'll see, it's not that difficult. Just follow the simple instructions, and in no time, you'll be reproducing the very same techniques you see being performed by the highly trained models in the photographs. No problem.

That's right. *You* can become one of those people about whom everyone else exclaims, "What great hands you've got!" Just remember to focus on your "giver's attitude" as much as your manual skills, and you'll do just fine.

## Chapter 9

# Massage Moods: Getting the Setting Right

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▷ Making sure that everything looks, sounds, smells, and feels right
  - ▷ Trading places
- 

**S**ay your husband or wife or roommate sees you reading this book for hours on end and eventually says something to you like, “Hey, how about giving ME a massage? Right now!”

Your immediate response should be:

- A. Sure, lie down on the linoleum here and we’ll get started.
- B. No way, I’m too nervous about ever actually doing this stuff.
- C. I haven’t finished the book yet.
- D. Okay, but give me a few minutes to set the right mood.

Yes, oh intelligent massage student, you’ve once again chosen correctly. The answer is D. It’s definitely true that your partner appreciates it if you take a little time to set up a special environment or “massage mood” before you begin the actual massage. And, even if you’re in a less-than-ideal environment, don’t worry. You can materialize a magical massage mood just about anywhere if you use some of the ideas in this chapter to create your own “inner chamber.”

## *Creating the Inner Chamber*

One of the big secrets to giving a good massage has very little to do with the massage itself. It has to do, rather, with where the massage is happening. And I’m not talking about exotic locales like Bali or Atlantic City. I’m referring to more accessible locations, like your bedroom or the couch in your den.

So how do you turn these everyday places into someplace special? It's easy; the trick is to involve all the senses.

Massage, of course, relies heavily upon the senses for its effects. Your sense of touch, especially, is being bombarded the entire time you're giving or receiving a massage. But it would be a mistake to neglect the other senses; they can add greatly to your massage experience, too.

The sense of taste doesn't usually play a big part in massage, unless of course you like to use edible massage oils like strawberry, almond, and mint that are . . . whoops, I think we're straying a little beyond the scope of this chapter. Check out Chapter 19 for more information on sensual massage, including the use of all kinds of flavored oils.

Anyway, for now let's concentrate on the three remaining senses that come into play during a massage experience, also known as the 3 S's of your inner chamber:

- ✓ Scents
- ✓ Sights
- ✓ Sounds

## Scents

Professional massage therapists often coach their clients through some deep-breathing techniques as part of the massage. And, as you may suspect, all that breathing includes quite a bit of smelling, too. That's part of the reason why massage pros have so much concern about the way that their work-rooms smell. In addition, they also know how powerful the sense of smell can be for healing and relaxation.



Just sniffing a whiff of corn muffins like the ones your Aunt Betty used to bake when you visited her on weekends as a kid is enough to send you reeling back through the years, right? Why is that so? Aromas trigger a mighty emotional response because the molecules that enter your nose don't mess around. They do not pass GO; they do not collect \$200. Instead, they take a direct route straight into the midbrain area, which is the seat of your emotions and memories. This fact is a key to the power of *aromatherapy*.

### *Aromatherapy*

If you use advanced grammatical techniques to break down the word aromatherapy, you discover that it means "therapy with aromas." Aha! So, does that mean therapy with just any aroma, such as the aroma of sautéed onions, for example, or the aroma of diesel fuel at dawn?



Hardly. Aromatherapy is the use of highly concentrated *essential oils* from certain plants to stimulate the brain. This stimulation causes a positive effect on the nervous and glandular systems and thus the entire body. During a massage, you can utilize aromatherapy in several ways. In Chapter 11, you find out how to mix up an aromatherapy massage oil, but for now let's focus on three other aromatherapy tips that can help you scent your massage space.

- ✓ **Diffusers:** As the name suggests, a diffuser diffuses aroma into the air. Several inexpensive models (\$10–\$15) are available that use a miniature fan. Simply place a few drops of your favorite oil on a cotton pad, turn on the fan, and the scent of essential oils fills the room.
- ✓ **Candles:** Many commercially available candles have essential oils worked right into the wax, and burning one during a massage is a great way to combine effects in two of the three S's, sight and scent. Until recently, you had to visit a specialty shop to purchase aromatherapy candles, but now they're even available at your local grocery store. S.C. Johnson, for example, makers of Glade air fresheners, is now in the aromatherapy market with candles and sprays.
- ✓ **Bulb rings:** These little doo-dads were popular in the 1970s when they were used to cover up even more exotic aromas floating around the room at parties. Now they're making a comeback as aromatherapy aids. Basically, they're floppy little rings that you place over a light bulb. When you sprinkle several drops of essential oil into the ring and turn on the bulb, Presto! — instant aromatherapy.

If aromatherapy is something you're keenly interested in, I would recommend *Aromatherapy For Dummies* by Kathi Keville, published by IDG Books Worldwide, a book that promises to answer that age-old question, "How can I smell better and feel better at the same time?"

### ***Incense***



The musky, natural scents that burning incense creates can turn your inner chamber into a mystical and exotic environment, even if in reality it's just your guest bedroom. The problem is, many people overdo it with incense, fumigating the room with enough mystical and exotic smoke to choke themselves, their partner, and any unsuspecting insects living in the walls. This is not good.



When it comes to incense, a little goes a long way. Use it with moderation, and you can create just the right mood. If you're using one of those long thick sticks of incense, snap it off  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the way down and burn just the last bit. Also, you can crack a window open, weather permitting, to circulate a little fresh air with the smoke.

## An altar to the massage gods

Some people go so far as to create a special altar in the area where they give their massages. This is going a bit out into Shirley MacLaine land, I realize, but when you think about it, it makes sense. A massage can be a kind of shared spiritual experience (See Rule # 7 in Chapter 7), and an altar is a way to commemorate that.

So what should be on a massage altar, you ask? You can place the objects mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, such as water fountains, candles, incense burners, and flowers on your altar.

Then you can go a step further and add a photograph or two as well. Pick a subject that reminds you of spiritual things, such as a photo of the Dalai Lama, Saint Francis, or whales cavorting in the waves.

If you spend time meditating or simply sitting quietly at your altar, you can imbue the space with a quiet energy. People who join you there may notice the difference. I don't know if this is due to an actual exchange of peaceful molecules, an increase in negative ions, or what, but it can definitely be felt.

There are thousands of brands and "flavors" of incense. My favorite is the Nag Champa scent, which, although I've never been there, reminds me of a sacred meditation cave in the Himalayas.

### Flowers

Nothing beats the scent of fresh flowers in your massage area. You don't need a big vase and a big budget to make it happen either. All that's necessary is a small bowl, a cup, or a mug from the kitchen cabinet that you fill with water, and a single flower. Roses or gardenias work especially well. Snip the flower off the stem and float it on the water. This fills the air with scent for hours or even days.



If you want to get really romantic, spread some fresh petals on the bed or other massage surface to set the mood. Cleopatra had her love chamber filled a foot deep with rose petals before Anthony made his big entrance.

### Sights

It may sound funny to focus on the sights of a massage space because, after all, the person receiving the massage will probably have her eyes closed most of the time anyway. But during those few minutes when she first enters, and whenever she opens her eyes, she'll soak in her surroundings. There are a few simple things that you can use to add to the relaxing ambience:

- ✓ **Candles:** Candles cast an enchanting glow over any massage experience, and they can add to the scent as well, as I mention earlier.



- ✓ **Flowers:** Even a small bunch of silk flowers placed with care near the massage area shows this is someplace special.
- ✓ **Lighting:** You can do some simple things with lighting to make your space massage-friendly.
  - Turn the lights down low. This helps the person on the receiving end concentrate more on the massage, perhaps because she won't feel like you are scrutinizing her body under a microscope.
  - Throw a silk scarf over a lampshade to create instant mood lighting during a massage.
- ✓ **Color:** Drape the area with soft colorful fabrics.

## Sounds

Carefully selected sounds serve two main purposes during a massage:

- ✓ They add to the mood.
- ✓ They mask other, distracting, sounds like traffic noises and TVs.

There are a number of really interesting ways to make sound a part of your massage, and you may find that some massage pros carry an entire arsenal of sound makers to add to their clients' experience. Some of my favorites include:

- ✓ **Tibetan meditation bowls:** These look like simple brass bowls, but when you glide a wooden instrument along the rim, they sing out beautifully with rich vibrant tones.
- ✓ **Ting shaks:** Another Tibetan invention, you strike these heavy brass bells together to form a clear, long-lasting tone that sets a meditative mood for a massage.
- ✓ **Gongs:** Yes, miniature versions, complete with a little gong hammer, are available.
- ✓ **Wind chimes:** A classic in the relaxing-sounds category, there are literally thousands of types available. If you can't be near an open window to hear the chimes, place them indoors near an oscillating fan to simulate blowing breezes.

And, if all else fails . . . earplugs work wonders. You can get them at your local drugstore.

## Water

You know those cute little burbling pots filled with rocks and miniature waterfalls? You can find them in a lot of gift shops these days, and while they are a tad overpriced, they definitely add a lot to the ambience of a massage. If

you're the industrious type, you can overcome the price problem by building a little indoor fountain for yourself. All it takes is a container, some rocks, and a small submersible water pump.

Of course, being outside near a source of natural flowing water is a great choice, too, but then you have to consider other details, such as temperature, rain, insects, and privacy.



One thing to remember — the sound of running water seems to have a powerful effect on the bladder. Make extra sure your partner visits the bathroom before receiving a massage with a waterfall nearby.

### *Music*

Music, of course, is the most popular type of sound used to complement massage. In most big spas, for example, they pump music directly into the massage rooms from a central sound system, putting the guests in the right mood to relax and unwind.

One massage manufacturing company built stereo speakers right into the bed of a massage table so that when you lie down on it, the music literally vibrates you. While this may be going a bit far, music is still the best and easiest way for you to include the element of sound in your massage.

An entire industry has sprung up to provide music appropriate for massage. If you want to experience some of the most popular massage music, try putting one of the following tapes or CDs on the next time you exchange a massage:

- ✓ George Winston's *December*
- ✓ Pachelbel's *Cannon*
- ✓ Deuter *Ecstasy*
- ✓ Anything by Stephen Halpern
- ✓ Brian Eno, *Music for Airports*
- ✓ Ray Lynch, *Music to Disappear Into*
- ✓ Enya, especially her *Orinoco Flow* CD
- ✓ The Cowboy Junkies, *Trinity Session* (a personal, offbeat favorite)
- ✓ Yanni, especially his *In My Time*
- ✓ Any relaxing classical music

Don't get the wrong idea here, though. Massage music doesn't necessarily have to be flutes or harps or Yanni 'til you yawn. You can be creative in your choices, and sometimes the best massages are given to the most unlikely accompaniment. See the sidebar "Reggae massage."



## Reggae massage

One day when I was in charge of the massage crew at a large spa in Florida, I suddenly was completely fed up with the droning of flutes, harps, and syrupy synthesizer music that poured endlessly out of the stereo speakers in each of the 24 massage rooms. Heading to the sound control room, I secretly exchanged the well-worn New Age CDs for some reggae discs with distinctively upbeat sounds.

It was the middle of a lazy, rainy afternoon. The massage rooms were filled with customers who were all paying upwards of \$5,000 per week to be there, and I wasn't sure exactly what the reaction would be: Would the customers complain? Would I be fired?

After just two hours, the verdict came in, and someone passed me the message . . . "Steve, the spa director wants to see you in her office."

Gulp.

When I arrived, the director had an expression of profound curiosity on her face. "Do you know what was going on with the music in the massage rooms this afternoon?" she asked.

"I . . . um, well . . ."

"Because whatever it was, the customers loved it. Two of them even wanted to know where they could purchase a copy for themselves! Nobody has ever asked that before."

I was glad to be off the hook, and I was happy to know that most people seemed to agree with me on the subject of massage music. It doesn't always have to be so . . . well, tranquilizing.



As a final note about music, remember that the person receiving the massage is always right. This includes being right about the choice of music, even if that choice makes absolutely no sense to you. I had one client who always insisted on receiving his massages to the accompaniment of the local rock & roll radio station. Go figure.

## Location location location



Once, in a typically cramped New York City apartment, I had to give a massage on the only available large flat surface, which turned out to be a wooden dining room table. We lay a few blankets and pillows down on it, and I scurried from side to side dodging walls and other furniture, but in the end my client reported feeling quite comfortable, and he loved his massage. I wouldn't recommend this, but it just goes to show that you definitely don't need a fancy expensive massage table or a special peaceful room in your house in order to give a good massage.

You can comfortably give massages in any room, including living rooms, bedrooms, family rooms, and as the story above points out, even the dining room. There are a few issues you want to keep in mind, though, when deciding where to give a massage:

- ✓ **Privacy:** It's important to respect the level of privacy the person receiving the massage desires. If possible, choose a room where you can close the doors to keep other people out. On the other hand, some people actually prefer to be less private, and they are more comfortable in an area with some activity.
- ✓ **Warmth:** Avoid areas with a draft or air conditioning vent directly overhead.
- ✓ **Intentions:** It may be a good idea to avoid giving massage in a bedroom if the person receiving is not your romantic partner. That way you avoid possibly giving the wrong message.
- ✓ **Space:** You need some space to maneuver around in — perhaps more than you realize. Before you begin, make sure you have enough room on all sides to move without disturbing your partner.

## *Privacy, please*

When someone's receiving a massage, she wants to pretend that she's on a secluded tropical isle, with no one else around for miles. She's a Polynesian princess, the center of attention, and the person giving the massage is focused on her and her alone. Exotic birds are floating overhead, and one lone white sail puffs out on the aquamarine horizon . . . then, suddenly, she hears a voice: "Bart just threw up on my homework!"

Yes, it's difficult for your partner to achieve her ultimate romantic illusion if, in real life, she's receiving her massage on the couch in your den, with *The Simpsons* turned up full blast on the TV.

Do your partner a favor — indulge her in her illusions. While it's not always possible to take a trip to Fiji to give your massage, you can avoid some of the more obvious distractions quite easily:

- ✓ Turn off the TV.
- ✓ Put up a little "Do Not Disturb" sign.
- ✓ Try to schedule the massage for a time when there are few interruptions.
- ✓ Turn off the ringer on the phone and turn down the volume on the answering machine.

## The “massage mood”

What I’ve included in this chapter so far are the external aspects of the inner chamber. But, of course, when it comes to inner chambers, it’s the inside that counts, and that’s what this section is about. Even if you find yourself in a less-than-ideal situation to give massage, with distractions abounding, no music to listen to, and not a candle in sight, you can still create the most important aspect of that inner chamber, the “massage mood.”

When you first lay your hands upon someone else to give them a massage, what do you have in your mind? Chances are, you’re a little nervous, a little uncertain of how the other person is going to receive you. And that’s all right. It means you care. But how about how *she’s* feeling? You, as the giver, are in charge of creating the optimal mood for her experience.



In order to create an appropriate mood for the other person, what you have to do first is get into that mood yourself. By imagining yourself in one of the following four personas as you begin a massage — saint, doctor, mother, buddy — you can quickly adopt the mood that goes with it. Then, you can give your partner something that comes from deep inside, creating the true inner chamber.

### *Saint*

Part of giving a good massage is having some simple compassion for the person you’re touching. We are, after all, in the same boat, each one of us anchored to a fragile body in an uncertain world. You can reach out to others when you massage them, crossing the barriers of separation, sending the message that you understand how they feel. This is the golden rule of most religions; touch others as you would have them touch you.

### *Doctor*

If you’re just a beginner, you shouldn’t be out there trying to “fix” your Aunt Jeanne’s sciatica with your massage techniques. However, it helps to think in terms of helping the person feel better, not just rubbing oil on. As you begin a massage, imagine your hands filled with healing energy, communicating the intention to soothe and make whole.

### *Mother*

Who ever cared about us more than good ole Mom? She had a level of acceptance for our quirks and our shortcomings that was just plain astounding. You can aim that same kind of unconditional love toward your massage partner (at least for that one hour), making him feel perfect just the way he is.



## Touching José

*(While volunteering at the University of Miami Medical Center AIDS ward, I discovered that you can create a caring compassionate "massage mood" anywhere, even in a sterile hospital room. This is the story of José, whom I met there.)*

On the bright Christmas Eve morning that we entered his room, José's body was wracked with pain, and he was curled into a fetal position on his hospital bed. His family stood at the foot of the bed arranged like a choir — mother, father, aunts, uncles, siblings, and friends. All of them with their hands at their sides, standing several feet away.

Jackson Memorial Hospital did not employ Rob Boyte, a nurse, and me, a massage therapist. We were volunteers with the P.A.L.M.S. foundation, and we were there to touch José.

You see, nobody else would touch José because these were the early days of AIDS and everyone was still afraid, even the doctors and the other nurses. Even the family members of the victims were afraid. Everyone kept his distance.

José had received a spinal tap the night before. Convulsions ran through his body, up to his head and back down. He could only speak in broken, grunted syllables. His family translated for us.

"He says he wants the massage," said one relative.

"He thinks it would feel good," said another. "Go ahead, try."

We approached the bed. Both of us stood on the same side, facing José's exposed back. Rob gently placed one large hand on the back of José's neck, not moving it at all. I touched him, too. José didn't relax into the touch; he couldn't because of the convulsions. He moaned, but not

with pleasure either like many massage clients do. Instead, he moaned with something deeper, almost like pain itself, and I knew immediately what it was. All of the family members knew what it was, too.

José was letting out the primal moan of someone who had not been touched for a long time, at the point in his life when he most desperately needed to be touched.

Subtly, José pressed his back up into my hands. I watched the family members lean forward, lifting their hands slightly, as if they too were touching José, although they were too terrified to do so themselves.

Slowly, I stroked down José's back, then back up again. His skin was cold, then hot in turns. The family members stared hard at our hands. We were not wearing rubber gloves because we knew AIDS was not transmitted by skin-to-skin contact. Everyone should have known it, but they didn't.

Slowly, José responded. His convulsions subsided. He became quiet. For a few minutes, everyone there could see that he was all wrapped up in the sensation of two other humans, four other hands, touching him, soothing him, being with him in the way that only CONTACT can provide.

Then it was time to go. The ward was filled with other patients on that Christmas Eve day. Rob and I moved to the sink where we washed our hands with red disinfectant soap. We smiled at the family, and they smiled back at the two strangers who had just shared such an intimate moment.

We left the room and moved on. Then, a few minutes later, we heard a gasp, a cry, then a high female wail come echoing down the white

tiled hospital corridor. The family came flowing out of José's room one by one, their eyes wild with pain, filled with tears. One of the women looked straight into my soul then in that hallway for one brief second. What I saw in her eyes, behind the pain, was gratitude. For a brief time,

I had become her hands and allowed her to do something she would never be able to do herself. Because now, it was too late.

Nobody could touch José anymore.

### *Buddy*

Don't let all this serious stuff about saints and doctors scare you away from giving a massage. There's another, more lighthearted, giver's personality, too, that of the buddy. You can just hang out together and have some fun while you're exchanging massage, and that's perfectly acceptable. Go ahead, put a little reggae on the CD player. Tell a few jokes to break the ice. Relax and have an easy conversation during the massage. Sometimes this is the best choice when your partner is apprehensive about receiving the massage.

The story in the sidebar "Touching Jose" is an example of how, when it comes time to actually touch a human being, the buddy blends with the saint, and the mother and doctor become two sides of the same coin.

## *Trading Places*

It's not that difficult to find a professional massage therapist with whom you can trade money for massage. Money seems to be a great motivational tool when it comes to getting people to massage you. It can be very tricky, however, to find an amateur. By definition, you are not going to pay the amateur, and therefore you must offer some other form of incentive to get him to give the massage. Most frequently, this incentive comes in the form of a reciprocal massage. But what if that is not enough to motivate your partner?

I'm trying not to be sexist here, but statistical evidence suggests that one gender in particular has motivational problems when it comes to *giving* massage. Yes, I'm talking about males, 95% of whom, when asked by their loving partners to give a massage, develop an instantaneous and very debilitating case of temporary-fatigue-syndrome (TFS). Even the thought of moving just a pinkie finger suddenly makes them feel very tired. As soon as the request for massage is withdrawn, however, they bounce back incredibly fast and can often be observed playing touch football just moments later.

Here are some ways to motivate a partner who is the unfortunate victim of TFS:

- ✓ Suggest to him that his love life might suffer dire consequences unless he gives you a massage.
- ✓ Suggest to him that his love life could be greatly enhanced were he to be so kind as to give you a full hour massage.
- ✓ In exchange for the massage, offer to let him go shopping at his favorite store (camping store, hardware store, computer store, or whatever his cute little male fixation may be) and don't bug him about spending money there.
- ✓ If he agrees to massage you at least three times, let him pick the destination for your next vacation (yes, even if it's bass fishing on Lake Okeechobee).

Your mate is not the only person with whom you can form a massage-trade relationship. Other potential partners include:

- ✓ Somebody who practices massage professionally (it may surprise you how many pros don't receive massage nearly as often as they'd like — your offer to trade, although you're less experienced, is likely to be met with considerable enthusiasm).
- ✓ Members of your church
- ✓ Members of your family
- ✓ Friends of the family
- ✓ Members of a sports team you're on



It may be challenging at first to find a way to be comfortable trading massages. It's an admittedly intimate form of sharing, and not everyone takes to it right away. One good alternative to jumping straight into a full body massage is to try some seated massage with the clothes still on. You may find plenty of non-threatening options in the chapters to come.

## Chapter 10

# All The Right Moves

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Finding out about contraindications
  - ▶ Building your massage muscles
  - ▶ Doing the moves
  - ▶ Exploring massage gizmos
- 

**Y**es, this is the chapter where you'll find all those massage moves that you can use to turn your everyday, ordinary hands into instruments of irresistible pleasure. Your fingertips and palms will be sought after by friends, family, co-workers, and complete strangers alike. Everybody will say, "Use some of those moves on me! Me me me me me!"

Then, inflated by your newfound abilities and the quick expertise you acquire in these pages, you may find yourself thinking, like many of us did in the beginning, that these neat new massage moves you've learned actually are the massage itself. But you'd be wrong! Oh yes, very wrong.

Massage moves are not the massage; they're just the medium.

Let me give you an analogy to help explain this:

Learning massage is like learning to play a musical instrument. The moves in this chapter are the notes on the scale, plus some basic chords and combinations. They're great ways to warm up your fingers and make some rudimentary noises, but if you continue to play them over and over again, you're going to drive the people close to you crazy.

In massage, you have to go beyond the moves pretty quickly. You need to develop a "moveless movement," or "flow," in which you're concentrating not on your own technique, but on your partner's feelings, her sensations, and her reactions, just like a musician who forgets all about notes and scales, sharps and flats, and even the instrument itself. Your movements are the technique, the body you massage is the instrument, and it's the interaction between the two that makes the music.

Massage is the music, the communication, the thing that you create, NOT the movements required to produce the sensations.

Whoa! Getting a little deep here, aren't we? Sorry about that. Don't worry — the rest of this chapter's going to be very practical and concrete. After all, you still have to learn your scales before you can play Carnegie Hall.

## Don't Do It, Mon!

Just like the Jamaican bobsled team, you may be all fired up to go out and practice your new moves. Before you jump off the cliff and begin massaging away recklessly on anybody who lets you near them, however, stop for a moment to consider some sage words of advice about:

- ✓ Conditions that you should NOT treat
- ✓ Places you should AVOID touching
- ✓ Moves you should NOT make

## Contraindications



As innocuous as massage may seem, there are still times when you should refrain from giving one because it may adversely affect a health condition of the person who receives it. *Contraindications* is the medical term for these conditions, a word which, when you look at it closely, obviously means “Nicaraguan rebel indications.” No, really, “contra” means against, as in contrary, and indications are things that tell you what to do one way or the other. So contraindications are things that are telling you not to do something.

The list of contraindications for massage may be longer than you expect, and it includes some conditions that at first glance don't seem like massage would affect at all. Take a look:

- ✓ **Fever:** When you have a fever, your body is trying to isolate and expel an invader of some kind. Massage increases overall circulation and could therefore work against your body's natural defenses.
- ✓ **Inflammation:** Massage can further irritate an area of inflammation, so you should not administer it. Inflamed conditions include anything that ends in *-itis*, such as phlebitis (inflammation of a vein), dermatitis (inflammation of the skin), arthritis (inflammation of the joints), and so on. In the case of localized problems, you can still massage around them, however, avoiding the inflammation itself.

- ✓ **High blood pressure:** High blood pressure means excessive pressure against blood vessel walls. Massage affects the blood vessels, and so people with high blood pressure or a heart condition should receive light, sedating massages, if at all.
- ✓ **Infectious diseases:** Massage is not a good idea for someone coming down with the flu or diphtheria, for example, and to make matters worse, you expose yourself to the virus as well.
- ✓ **Hernia:** Hernias are protrusions of part of an organ (such as the intestines) through a muscular wall. It's not a good idea to try and push these organs back inside. Surgery works better.
- ✓ **Osteoporosis:** Elderly people with a severe stoop to the shoulders often have this condition, in which bones become porous, brittle, and fragile. Massage may be too intense for this condition.
- ✓ **Varicose veins:** Massage directly over varicose veins can worsen the problem. However, if you apply a very light massage next to the problem, always in a direction toward the heart, it can be very beneficial.
- ✓ **Broken bones:** Stay away from an area of mending bones. A little light massage to the surrounding areas, though, can improve circulation and be quite helpful.
- ✓ **Skin problems:** You should avoid anything that looks like it shouldn't be there, such as rashes, wounds, bruises, burns, boils, and blisters, for example. Usually these problems are local, so you can still massage in other areas.
- ✓ **Cancer:** Cancer can spread through the lymphatic system, and because massage increases lymphatic circulation, it may potentially spread the disease as well. Simple, caring touch is fine, but massage strokes that stimulate circulation are not. Always check with a doctor first.
- ✓ **Other conditions and diseases:** Diabetes, asthma, and other serious conditions each have their own precautions, and you should get a doctor's OK before administering massage.
- ✓ **HIV infection:** Some people still think of AIDS as something that can be "caught" through simple skin-to-skin contact, but most of us know that's not the case. If there is no exchange of bodily fluids (blood, semen, vaginal fluids, or mother's milk), HIV can't be transmitted during massage. So, HIV infection is not contraindicated for this reason. However, some of the infections that people suffering from the later stages of AIDS experience are contraindicated, and you should avoid those infections. Loving, soothing contact is extremely important for people at any stage of infection, but in the case of any visible rashes, sores, lesions, or swelling, massage is best left to a professional. If you have any cuts or scrapes or scratches on your hands, it's an especially good idea to wear thin surgical gloves while massaging an HIV-infected person with any signs of open lesions.

- ✓ **Pregnancy:** Most women love to receive massage during pregnancy, and it's perfectly fine to give them one, but there are a few precautions to observe. See the sidebar about pregnancy later in this chapter.

Just a minute here! All this makes it sound like you practically have to get a medical checkup and an OK from the doctor before giving someone a massage, doesn't it? Well, in many cases, that's exactly what it means. Always err on the side of caution when you're considering giving a massage to a person with any health concerns. Check it out with his or her physician first.

The first and foremost rule here is, "Do no harm." If you're not sure about a particular condition, don't give the massage.

## Bad moves



Ever watch an infant pet a cat? They often have the best of intentions, but they just can't seem to get it right. Wham! Wham! goes the beefy little hand on top of the cat's head, and the poor feline scurries away before the infant does any serious damage. Similarly, there are moves that you should not make during a massage, no matter how good your intentions are. They all cause discomfort, and some of them may even cause harm.

### Pregnancy — a contraindication?

There are some people who believe that pregnant women should not receive massage. Most of these people, needless to say, are not pregnant women, whose backs and legs are often quite sore, and who love massage. There's a section in Chapter 18 on this topic, but for now I want to put your mind at ease and say that it's perfectly okay to massage a pregnant woman, as long as you observe a few simple precautions:

- ✓ Always make sure her legs and head are supported with pillows.
- ✓ Never put her in a face-down position to massage her. In her last trimester, she should lie only on her side.
- ✓ Only light gliding strokes should be used directly on the abdomen. Don't press directly onto or knead in this area.
- ✓ Always give soothing, relaxing massage moves, never heavy or deep.
- ✓ Avoid the ankles and heels because, according to the theory of reflexology, the heels contain special points that may stimulate labor. Going into labor during a massage is not recommended. Chapter 14 has more info and a diagram showing the location of these reflexology points.



- ✓ **Neck pulling:** Do not grasp the head firmly and pull upward, attempting to lengthen the neck (some people say this is what happened to Audrey Hepburn).
- ✓ **Neck twisting:** Only a very gentle and slow turning of the neck to one side or the other is appropriate during massage. No sudden movements!
- ✓ **Neck pulling and twisting together:** Never ever, for any reason, pull and twist the neck at the same time. This can be very dangerous.
- ✓ **Bone cracking:** Never ever try to do a chiropractic-type adjustment if you haven't been trained as a . . . duh . . . chiropractor.
- ✓ **Bone pushing:** Don't press directly on bones, especially the spine. Instead, glide lightly over these areas.
- ✓ **Hyperextension:** Basic stretches are okay, and I explain several in Chapters 11 and 16. However, don't try to *hyperextend* any joint past its normal *range-of-motion* unless you receive some serious schooling in massage. This is hard to do with the knee or elbow, which resist such maneuvers, but you can easily hyperextend the neck, for example, so you need to use caution.

## Danger zones



"*Endangerment sites*" are super-sensitive areas on the body. These areas contain important pieces of your anatomy, like nerves and blood supply, for example, in exposed and vulnerable positions. Highly trained massage therapists can sometimes work in these areas, but if you're not a professional massage ace yourself, it's better to stay away from the following spots:

- ✓ **Front of the neck/throat:** You've heard of the expression, "Go for the jugular," right? Well, this is where you find it. Unless you're trying to choke someone, it's a good idea to stay away from this area that also contains the carotid artery and major nerves.
- ✓ **Side of the neck:** Not quite as sensitive as the front of the neck, you should still treat it delicately.
- ✓ **The "ear notch":** Just behind your jawbone and beneath your ear you find a little notch. It's not a good idea to jam a finger into this notch, unless you're trying to extort money or favors from the person receiving the massage, because it contains a sensitive facial nerve.
- ✓ **The eyeball:** Unless you're trying to do a Three Stooges massage (popular amongst college males), don't poke your fingers directly into the person's eyes.
- ✓ **The axilla:** This is a fancy term for the armpit which, as you know, is a sensitive area, filled with nerves, arteries, and lymph glands. Not to mention, most people are very ticklish there.

- ✓ **The upper inner arm:** Just down from the armpit, along the inside of the upper arm, is a sensitive, nerve-filled area along the length of the arm bone. Pressing here too firmly gives you that yucky-nervy feeling.
- ✓ **The ulnar notch of the elbow:** Otherwise known as the “funny bone,” this spot contains the ulnar nerve which, if you touch it too hard, causes normally discreet people to curse in several languages.
- ✓ **The abdomen:** Houdini was killed by an unsuspected punch to this area, which is filled with many squishy important bits known as organs. Be especially gentle around the upper abdomen along the ribs, where you find the liver, gall bladder, and spleen.
- ✓ **The lower back:** Just to both sides of the spine, and below the ribs, is where you find the kidneys. Don't press too hard here or pound on them. Kidneys don't like it when you do that.
- ✓ **The femoral triangle:** Not to be confused with the Bermuda triangle, this area is often referred to as the “groin.” It's the inner part of the line in front where your leg meets your body. If you press too hard here, you can actually cut off circulation to the leg.
- ✓ **Popliteal area:** Popularly known as the back of the knee, you should always treat this spot gingerly. It's very sensitive to pressure.

## *Please don't do that*

The ultimate contraindication is a request from the person receiving the massage that you stop doing what you're doing. Immediately. Quit it. No more!

When a person says, “Please don't do that,” then don't do that. This is especially true for well-meaning beginners, who have a tendency to press ever forward with their newfound massage skills, in spite of the complaints issuing forth from the poor soul beneath their fingers.

The following is NOT proper etiquette:

Massage partner: “It really hurts!”

You: “Oh no, it doesn't. That's just your tension melting away. Visualize your muscles as butter . . . .”

In massage, more than any other business, the customer is always right. But there are times when the person receiving the massage either doesn't know or won't tell you he's uncomfortable. How do you know what to do then? That's where body language clues come in.

### *Body language clues*

Some people think that when they're getting a massage they have to "grin and bear it" when something hurts. They figure massage is like a form of torture, and they're prisoners of war. They certainly aren't going to display any signs of weakness or let you know you're hurting them. Other people may not even know they're uncomfortable, because their discomfort is unconscious, and so they can't communicate it to you.

In these cases, wise massage givers have figured out certain non-verbal clues that they can use to determine when their massage is too strong. These include:

- ✓ Curling of the toes
- ✓ Arching the back
- ✓ Inability to speak in a normal tone
- ✓ Facial grimaces and contortions
- ✓ Excess sweating, especially in a cool room

So, what should you do when your partner starts showing signs of discomfort? The answer is simple — talk about it. Simple, straightforward communication clears up most situations immediately. Some people just won't be able to believe that you honestly want them to tell you how they feel. Go ahead, surprise them.

## **The one word never to say when you're giving a massage**

You can get away with almost any kind of amateur commentary while giving a massage to friends and family because, after all, they understand that you're an amateur. Thus, when you say, "Geez, am I pressing too hard there?" they're likely to respond with some positive criticism. However, there is one particular word that neither amateurs nor professionals should ever utter while in the middle of giving a massage. Hearing it strikes fear into the poor vulnerable person lying there receiving. And that word is . . .

"Oops."

Like a surgeon saying "oops" in the middle of an operation, or a pilot saying "oops" while making

the approach for landing, your saying "oops" in the middle of a massage, although hopefully not life-threatening, simply doesn't inspire confidence. It may lead some people to imagine horrible scenarios — injured muscles, crushed arteries, or indelible marks left on the skin.

The person receiving doesn't know what kind of massage move you're attempting to perform at any given moment. So, if you don't get the move exactly right each time, don't worry; she's not going to know the difference. Not unless you say "oops," that is.

## Building Your Massage Muscles

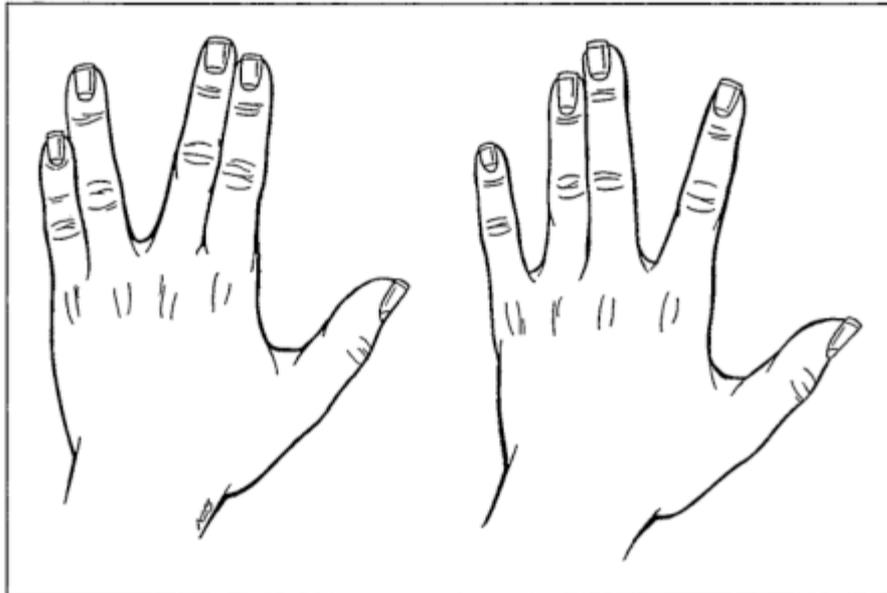
Massage requires the sustained dexterous use of certain muscles in your hands, forearms, shoulders, and in fact your entire body. You may not be using these muscles for any particular purpose right now. Like any other muscles that come suddenly into use, they may get sore when you begin using them. Don't be alarmed, as this is natural.

Here's a list of a few exercises and devices that massage pros sometimes use to help build massage muscles:

- ✓ **“Walking” a quarter:** Balance a quarter on your thumb. By using only the one hand, try to turn it over onto the top of your index finger. If you succeed, then try to flip it over onto your middle finger, and so on. When you get good, you can walk the quarter over all four fingers and catch it with the thumb again from below.
- ✓ **Finger dancing:** First, hold your hand in front of your face, with your palm facing away from you. Keeping your thumb out of the way, hold all four fingers loosely together. This is the starting position. Next, separate your fingers down the middle, two on each side. This position is shown in Figure 10-1. Finally, bring those fingers back together again, and then take just the pinkie finger and index finger away from the center. This position is also shown in Figure 10-1. Practice until you can repeat these steps over and over in a continuous loop.
- ✓ **Fingertip pushups:** For you fitness fanatics, try doing some fingertip pushups; these not only strengthen your fingers for massage, but you receive the added benefit of some powerful exercise. Be careful not to overdo it, and always check with a physician before starting a new exercise regime.
- ✓ **Grape squeezing:** In order to sensitize your fingers for delicate massage moves, you can practice squishing grapes. Simply place a grape between your thumb and your first two fingers and squeeze till you burst the skin. Practice squeezing new grapes until they're just about to burst, maintaining a constant sensitive level of pressure.
- ✓ **Lunges:** Lunges strengthen your legs and hips, making it easier for you to stand and bend and squat when you're giving a massage.
- ✓ **Dance:** Any kind of dance class is great to prepare you for using your whole body to do massage.
- ✓ **Yoga:** You won't believe how quickly you get tight and tired just from giving a simple massage. Doing yoga may help keep you limber.
- ✓ **Fist squeezing:** You can pick up a little stress-relief squeeze ball just about anywhere these days, even at the checkout counter in most drug-stores. These are great not only for relieving stress, but for building

hand muscles, too. There's even a special compound made just for this purpose, called "power putty," that is sold in massage stores.

- ✓ **Dumbbells:** Lighter weight dumbbells (5–12 pounds) are great for building muscles in the forearms and wrists. Simply sit on a bench with the dumbbell in one hand, support your forearm across the top of your leg, palm up, then curl and extend the forearm.



**Figure 10-1:** This simple finger exercise is harder than it looks, and it's great for building hand strength and coordination.

## *You Got 'da Moves*

So, what do you actually do when you place your hands on a body and start giving a massage? Well, the first thing many people do is panic. They stand there with their hands motionless on an arm or a leg or a back, and they think to themselves, "Oh my gosh, what do I do now?"

This is where the seven types of massage moves you find in this section come in handy. After practicing them, you can rest easy that you won't draw a blank when it comes time to give a massage.



## Feeling versus doing

Massage is as much (or more) about feeling as it is about doing. In fact, without really doing anything, you can still give a good massage. Through simple touch alone, you can have a profound effect on somebody else.

When I was in massage school, during the very first day in class, the instructor had us do a little experiment, which you can try for yourself.

Have your partner sit barefoot in front of you. Gently grasp one of her feet in your hands, and then **DON'T DO ANYTHING**. Just feel. Feel her foot, the weight of it in your hands, the contours

of it against your fingers and palms, its warmth, the pulse of the blood. Resist any temptation to squeeze or press or knead.

After just five or ten minutes, slowly pull your hands away and ask your partner to note the feeling in both of her feet. Almost everyone notices a large difference; the touched foot feels as though it's been vigorously massaged. It's tingling and alive.

All you had to do to achieve that effect was to feel. No need to do anything at all.

The seven basic categories of movements are:

- ✓ Gliding
- ✓ Pressing
- ✓ Kneading
- ✓ Rubbing
- ✓ Shaking
- ✓ Tapping
- ✓ Stretching

### *Slip-sliding away: The pleasures of gliding*

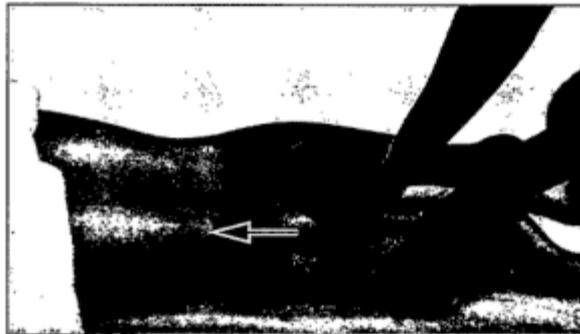
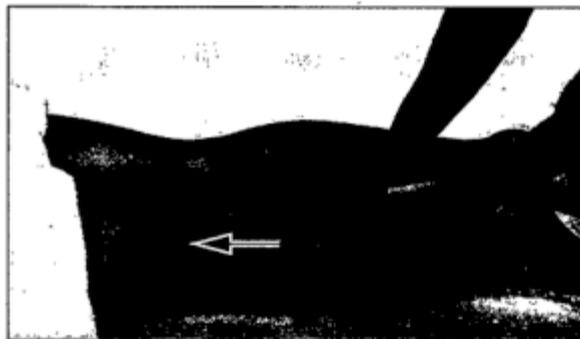
Usually the first move you make on any particular part of the body is gliding. Why glide first, you say? Why not just get right to the pressing and muscle-squeezing part of the massage? Three reasons:

- ✓ Gliding is a great way to warm up the skin and underlying muscles while simultaneously spreading your oil or massage cream.
- ✓ You cover a lot of territory during a glide, too, so it's perfect for "introducing" your hands to your partner.
- ✓ You'll get a feel for your partner's body and discover which areas may need the most attention during the rest of the massage.



Depending upon the amount of pressure you use, a glide can be light and ethereal or downright intense. Usually, at the beginning of a massage, you want to start with lighter gliding and then progress to the more heavy-duty stuff later, after your partner trusts your touch.

Take a look at Figure 10-2. These pictures make gliding look easy, right? What could be simpler than just running your hands along someone's skin? It's a little trickier than that, though. Good gliding is something you learn over time, with practice.



**Figure 10-2:**  
Long, soft,  
light gliding  
(top); sliding-  
down-the-  
banister  
gliding  
(middle);  
squeezing-  
toothpaste-  
through-a-  
tube gliding  
(bottom).

Here are three basic types of gliding:



- ✓ **Long, soft, light:** You can create the lightest type of gliding by just barely brushing the fingertips or palms across the skin in a feather-light fashion. This type of movement is also known as a *nerve-stroke* because it calms the nerves.
- ✓ **Sliding down the banister:** This movement follows the contours of the body more closely. As you glide, you mold your hands to fit the body, just like a little kid who molds himself to fit over the banister as he slides down it into the foyer. This is typical gliding, the type you use to spread oil, warm the body, and so on.
- ✓ **Squeezing toothpaste through a tube:** This is intense gliding or gliding with an attitude. When you try it on your partner for the first time, you may get a stunned reaction. You achieve this by wrapping your hands around a leg or an arm and squeezing firmly while you glide, as if you were trying to squeeze toothpaste from a giant tube. The most typical places for this maneuver are on the calf and the forearm.



Start out slowly, and always, always make the motions toward the heart because you actually move blood through the veins with this move. Watch out for the contraindications of varicose veins and phlebitis.

### *Good places to glide*

You can glide just about anywhere there's an expanse of skin to move over. Tight little nooks and crannies, like between the toes for example, are not good places to glide because there's not enough open territory. However, you can still glide on smaller surfaces, even over the eyelids (provided your partner is not wearing contact lenses). Simply adjust your hands to the area you are touching. Thus, a forehead glide would include just your fingertips, while a glide to the leg would include your whole palm.

For all types of gliding, you need to turn your hands into super-sensitive, micro-adjusting instruments that constantly change to conform to each and every little hill and valley on your partner's body. Imagine yourself trying to smooth out a sheet of plastic-wrap around an irregularly shaped piece of fruit, allowing no air-pockets or wrinkles. Got it?



### *"X" marks the spot: Pressing*

"Out, damned spot!" — *Shakespeare*

Great poets throughout the ages have understood the value of getting rid of spots. And it's no wonder. If you've ever received a back rub from someone and suddenly felt them press exactly the right spot, you know the sensation is swift and unmistakable. Immediately, you say something like, "Yes, there it is. That's the spot!"

So, what is the “spot” anyway? Massage pros have all kinds of fancy names for it, like “trigger points,” or muscle spasms, or adhesions. Whatever you call them, these points of tension or pain are what we’re trying to get rid of in massage, and pressing on them skillfully can help achieve that.

I envision these spots as tenacious little criminals who invade our bodies and take some of our muscles hostage. They’re tough, resourceful, and they thrive best when we don’t know exactly where to find them. Massage helps us locate where our tension spots are hiding so we can ferret them out. Just the right amount of pressure can send them this message:

*“It’s no use. We know you’re in there. Come out with your hands up. Let the hostages go, and you’ll get off easy.”*

Of course, if the “spots” don’t leave your muscles alone, you have to go in with some heavy firepower. That’s where pressing comes in. Here are a few steps you can follow to find spots and press them into submission:

- ✔ **Zeroing in:** First, while you’re warming the tissues up during your preliminary gliding strokes, feel for areas that are unusually tight, hard, or sensitive. (See the “Under pressure” sidebar in Chapter 8.) After you’re done gliding over a certain area, come back to these targeted spots one at a time and zero in on them by using just your fingertips or thumbs.
- ✔ **Pushing the walk button:** You know those little rubberized buttons that you push to change the light to green at intersections? They give a little at first, but then you get the feeling that you have to push harder. You can’t quite tell if you’re holding it down or not, so you hold it in firmly for a few seconds, much longer than you’d hold, say, the on/off switch on a desk lamp. Well, that’s the same kind of pressing you can use in your massage — good, firm, sustained pressure is what makes pressing work, as shown in Figure 10-3.
- ✔ **Pinpoint pressure:** You not only need the right spot; you need the EXACT right spot. This can mean an itty-bitty micro-difference in the location of your fingers or thumb. Keep feeling around until you can tell you’re directly on “top” of the spot. Usually this feels like you could easily slip off of it on either side.
- ✔ **Keep adjusting:** As you feel your partner’s body respond, you can adjust your pressure accordingly, lightening your pressure as the tension dissipates.

### ***Good places to press***

Finding the right spots to press may sometimes feel a little tricky to you. After all, the body has about a million different points on it. How do you tell where’s a good place to apply pressure and where’s not a good place? There are two answers:

- ✓ You have to practice feeling for these points (this is the art of palpation, which you find out about in Chapter 4).
- ✓ Certain points are common to most people. After you practice on several willing massage partners, you'll build your skill in locating them.



**Figure 10-3:**  
Finger  
pressing  
(top) and  
thumb  
pressing  
(bottom).



The spots we are talking about in this section are not *shiatsu points* or *acu-pressure points*, which are spots along energy pathways in the body. You get to know a few shiatsu points in Chapter 11; the spots we're talking about here are occasionally found in the same areas, but they're a different animal altogether.

### *Let's do the twist: Kneading*

After you master the art of kneading, you may be in great demand because kneading, in my opinion, produces the most pleasurable sensations of all the maneuvers. It gets in deep to flush out tension while at the same time stimulating a large surface area on the skin.

Your kneading technique can make or break you as a massage giver, so I recommend practicing quite a bit on this one. If you practice building your massage muscles, as suggested earlier in this chapter, you can be a better kneader because this particular maneuver requires a lot of strength in the hands.

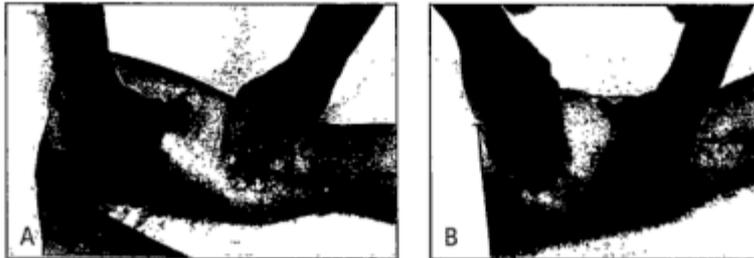


In order to knead effectively, you must banish fear! The biggest mistake novice kneaders make is kneading too tentatively. As a massage teacher, I've spent hundreds of hours hunched over students guiding their hands into bigger movements. "Get more flesh between those fingers!" I cajole them. "Twist your arms around some more. Use your whole body to make the movement."

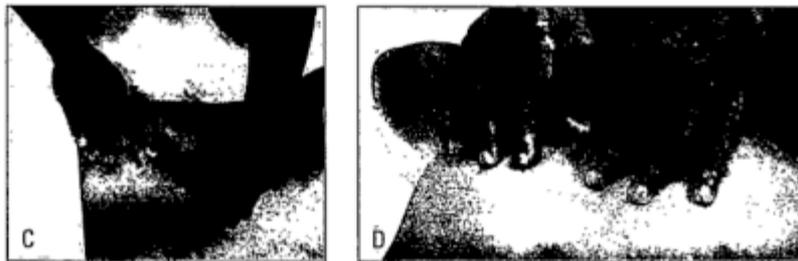
This is good advice for you, too. A wimpy knead is much worse than no knead at all. Here are some ways to make your kneading big, bold, and beloved by all who encounter it:

- ✓ **Come on everybody, let's do the Twist:** Chubby-Checker would have been disappointed if he looked out on the dance floor to find dozens of people just standing there and sort of half-heartedly bending a little at the waist. When he said twist, he meant Twist!, as in twist-tie and twist-off-top and wow-look-at-that-twister-about-to-destroy-the-barn! The number one rule for kneading is to use your whole body to create a twisting movement around the area you're working on. See Figure 10-4, which shows how your hands can move around a thigh in a circular wringing motion.
- ✓ **Baker making bread:** Of course, when we think of kneading, the image of a baker often comes to mind, with his hands wrist-deep in pliable flour, constantly squeezing, rolling, and pushing. In fact, those are the three components of a successful knead. After you have twisting down, add these steps to complete the picture:
  - **Squeezing:** During your twist, the hand that's furthest away (the right hand as shown in Figure 10-5a) is *squeezing* in as much flesh as possible between the fingers and palms.
  - **Rolling:** The right hand *rolls* the squeezed flesh back toward you while the near hand begins its journey away from you, pushing more flesh into the fold, as shown in Figure 10-5b.
  - **Pushing:** Finally, you're in the position shown in Figure 10-5c, and your right hand starts *pushing* while your left hand takes over the squeezing and rolling.
- ✓ **Pinching and rolling:** This final type of kneading is often called skin rolling. It's reserved for areas that normally don't respond too well to bigger twisting, squeezing, and rolling maneuvers. It's a little tricky to do, but most people love the way it feels. First, pinch a roll of flesh between your thumb and the first two fingers. Then, keeping your thumb locked in position, glide your whole hand over the skin while "walking" your first two fingers forward so that they push a constant roll of skin back against your thumb as shown in Figure 10-5d.

**Figure 10-4:** Notice how your hands, arms, shoulders, and entire body move around the area you are kneading.



**Figure 10-5:** Squeezing (a), rolling (b), pushing (c), and pinching and rolling (d).



***Good places to knead***



By definition, to knead something means you have to grasp it between your fingers or palms. Therefore, areas of the body that you can't grasp, you can't knead. It's simple: no flesh, no knead. That's why it's trickier to knead skinny people than to knead fleshy people. That's why it's trickier to knead a knee than to knead a thigh. That doesn't mean you need to knead a whole handful

of flesh to get the job done, though. You can perform the last type of kneading, skin rolling, even on areas with almost no fat, like a supermodel's upper back, for instance.

## *Wax on, wax off: Rubbing*

The secret to successful rubbing, or *friction* as massage pros call it, is to make the pressure from your fingers or palms strong enough to stay stationary on the surface of the skin while moving the layers below. In other words, your fingers don't glide while they rub, although they can definitely move around quite a bit. Take, for example, the maneuvers you receive on your head when you get a shampoo at a salon. A good shampoo person employs friction techniques, holding her fingers steady on a certain part of your scalp while manipulating your head beneath it. If she simply glides her fingers across your scalp, the sensation is disturbingly inadequate.

Another analogy for rubbing is waxing your car. You take a buffing pad in one hand and you rub the wax on. Then with a rag in the other hand, you rub the wax off. Your fingers are never in contact with the car itself, but the car receives the effects, not the buffing pad or rags. So it is with massage. Your fingers are in contact with the skin, but you're affecting the layers below.

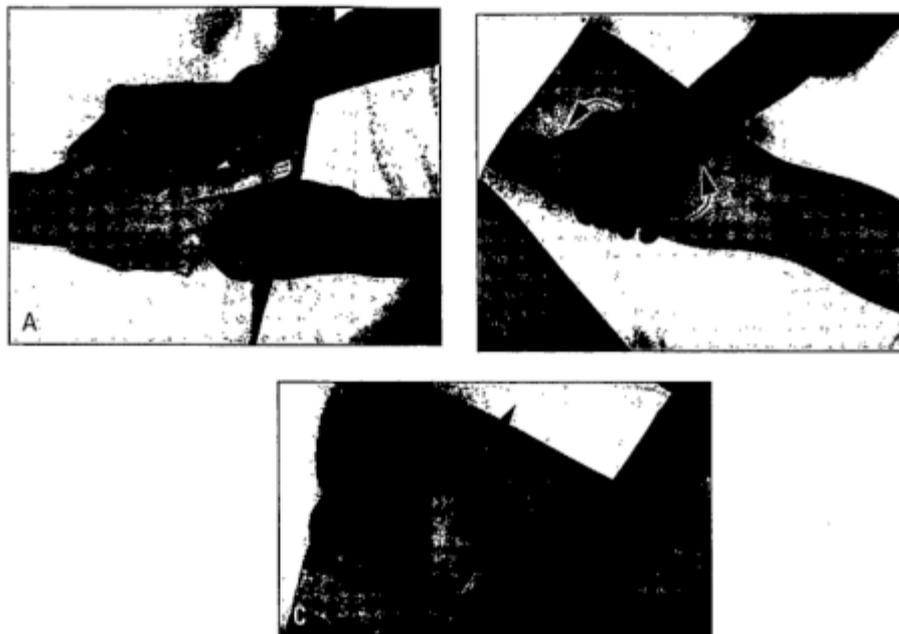
Here are a few rubbing techniques that work well for various parts of the body:

- ✓ **Miser's rub:** Especially good for the fingers and toes, the miser's rub will remind you of someone rubbing a gold coin between their fingers, as shown in Figure 10-6a.
- ✓ **Circular:** Making sure your fingers are planted securely, move the skin over the tissues below it in small circles, as shown in Figure 10-6b. You can move your hand gradually along the skin's surface, creating a series of circles over an entire area.
- ✓ **Cross fiber:** In any given area of the body, the muscle fibers are running predominantly in one direction or another. On the inside of your upper arm, for instance, the biceps muscle runs from your shoulder to your elbow, up and down. If you rub in a cross-wise direction over these fibers, from the inside of your arm to the outside, you're making a *cross-fiber* movement, as shown in Figure 10-6c. This action is especially good for people who exercise a lot or are in the later stages of recovering from an injury because it promotes the repair of scar tissues.



### *Good places to rub*

You can rub most everywhere, but you have to be careful in sensitive areas because rubbing can be a little annoying if it's done, say, on the eyelids.



**Figure 10-6:**  
The miser's  
rub (a), the  
circular rub  
(b), and the  
cross-fiber  
rub (c).

## *Shake, rattle, and roll: Shaking*

Some people are afraid to get too “physical” when they give a massage, which doesn’t make much sense when you think about it. They incorrectly assume that every massage move has to be as smooth and soothing as the next CD from Enya. But this is not true. Some of the best moves actually jostle you around quite a bit.

You have to imagine what the shaking is actually doing internally to the muscles, tendons, and bones where they attach to each other inside the body. It’s like loosening fruit from a tree. Imagine that you’re standing on the ground in front of an apple tree, and one big perfect juicy apple is still left just barely clinging to a high branch. Grasping a lower limb, you *shake with the intention of loosening something at a distance from you*. This is the essence of shaking in massage, too.

Of course, you don’t want to literally loosen muscles from bone so that they fall off, but you do want to help ease the muscles’ tight grip of chronic tension, especially in the joints. Shaking is great for this, and there’s a fine art to it. Here are three different versions that you can practice:

### *Vibration*

No other massage move feels quite as dramatic as vibration. It's a show biz move, a move with pizzazz. But first of all, you have to figure out how to do it, which isn't that easy for most of us. Here are the steps (and see Figure 10-7):

- ✓ Placing just your fingertips on the area to be vibrated (try the back, which is easiest to start with), stiffen all of your joints from your fingers all the way up to your shoulders.
- ✓ Try making your entire arm tremble as one unit, as if you were extremely cold and shivering uncontrollably.
- ✓ Pressing firmly, concentrate all of that trembling down into your fingertips.
- ✓ Simultaneously, drag your fingertips slowly down over your partner's back, remembering to imagine your movements loosening muscles all along the way.



Be careful not to vibrate a fingertip directly on top of the spine as you may cause some discomfort or bruising.



**Figure 10-7:**  
Creating high speed vibration takes concentration and a willingness to look spastic.

### *Shaking*

In this move, you grasp one part of your partner's body (usually a limb) and then recreate the same kind of rigid trembling you did for vibration. It can be a slower trembling, though, even languid, but the intent is still to loosen deep muscles. See Figure 10-8.

**Figure 10-8:** Shaking is similar to vibration, but you grasp instead of press.



### *Rocking & rolling*

A doctor named Milton Trager developed a kind of massage called, appropriately, *Trager*, which includes an awful lot of rocking and rolling, as shown in Figure 10-9. One of the results of a really good Trager massage is a deep release of tension from areas that you wouldn't be able to get to with your fingers, like deep inside joints. You can recreate some of the effects of this type of massage by doing some very gentle rocking and rolling of your own. You find out more about how to apply this to specific areas in the next chapter.

**Figure 10-9:** Rocking and rolling produces an effect on the surrounding muscles and distant joints as well.





### *Good places to shake*

The limbs respond exceptionally well to shaking. However, if you shake the head, you're coming dangerously close to a chiropractic maneuver, which is a definite no-no.

Larger areas such as the back and thighs respond well to vibration, and you can rock the whole body, especially when your partner is lying face down.

## *Get into the rhythm: Tapping*

This is the type of movement that you see movie actors performing when they think they're doing some really authentic massage on-screen. It also seems to be the preferred move for overweight Russian men giving massages in bathhouses. Yes, I'm talking about the famous karate-chop family of massage maneuvers, otherwise known as tapping.

This family of moves is based upon one major concept: getting pounded on feels surprisingly good. This is true, as long as you tap judiciously, with the right amount of pressure. To achieve seasoned tapping prowess, practice with the three basic hand-shapes for tapping: the open fingertip, the karate hack, and the loose fist. All of them are done with "soft" hands because, after all, your intention is not to attack ninja-style but to increase circulation and soothe sore muscles.

The secret to all good tapping is the rhythm. If you're not a natural born drummer, try slowing your tapping down until you reach a rhythm that you can sustain easily. It's not speed that counts, but consistency.

- ✓ **Fingertip tapping:** This is the lightest tap, excellent for faces and the top of your head. A lot of cosmetologists use this move to bring extra circulation to the cheeks, creating that "rosy glow" look. Tapping is shown in Figure 10-10a.
- ✓ **Karate hacking:** Make sure to keep the hands limp and not treat your partner's body like a board you're trying to break. Don't hack directly on bony areas, of course. Keep your wrists loose and let the edges of your flopping fingers do a lot of the hacking for you, as shown in Figure 10-10b.
- ✓ **Loose fist pounding:** You have to be extra careful when using your fists for tapping, but they definitely come in handy if your partner is one of those NFL linebacker types who doesn't seem to respond to normal massage manipulations. Don't tighten your fists completely when tapping, and resist the temptation to do a Rocky-Balboa-side-of-beef-in-the-freezer move. See Figure 10-10c.



**Figure 10-10:**  
Fingertip tapping (a),  
karate hacking (b), and  
loose fist  
pounding (c).

***Good places to tap***



Tapping feels good just about anywhere, but if you tap someone too hard on the top of his head, he's likely to think you have something against him. The usual rule is: the more flesh in an area, the more force you can tap with, progressing up the scale from fingertips to hacking hands to loose fists. Bony areas like the knees need light tapping with just the fingertips. Also, go

feather-light on the kidney area on either side of the spine in the lower back. Certain spots you may not think of, like the bottom of the feet for example, are great places to hack. And of course the ever-popular back, buttocks, and thighs are great places to practice “getting into the rhythm.”

## Keep it loose: Stretching

Stretching is really good for you, and a lot of people don't stretch as much as they should in order to stay limber and youthful. You can help solve this problem by incorporating a few stretching moves right into your massage.

Stretching feels really good as long as you follow three easy guidelines:

- ✓ Ease your partner into it.
- ✓ Easy does it while you're doing it.
- ✓ Ease your partner out of it.



Remember that each joint has a limit as to how far it will stretch in any and all possible directions, and this limit is called its *range of motion*.



Don't try stretching any part of the body past its normal range of motion because, if you do, it will hurt. A lot. Stop long before you think you reach the maximum stretch. Always ask your partner for feedback about how the stretch feels. Some people are super limber and you can twist them like pretzels while others can take very little stretching before it becomes uncomfortable.

Be especially careful when stretching your partner's neck, moving it slowly and in only one plane at a time: left to right, up and down, or ear to shoulder. And don't *hyperextend* the neck, or any joint for that matter. (See the *contraindications* section earlier in this chapter.)

There are three basic types of stretches you can apply during a massage:

- ✓ **Passive stretching:** Passive stretching doesn't mean you should have a ho-hum attitude about the stretch. It means your partner just lies there passively and doesn't assist you at all while you stretch him, as shown in Figure 10-11.
- ✓ **Active assisted stretching:** This type of stretching, shown in Figure 10-12, requires your partner to move through the stretch while you help her stretch a little further. It's not recommended for lazy partners who just want to lie back and have you do all the work during the massage.

✓ **Active resisted stretching:** In this one, your partner resists the movement of the stretch that you're giving him. When he stops resisting, you are able to stretch him even further. This one's good for strengthening muscles and can be considered a kind of mini-workout.

**Figure 10-11:**  
In this passive stretch of the knee and thigh, you press the person's ankle toward her buttock while she just lies there letting it happen.



**Figure 10-12:**  
In active assisted stretching, you help your partner stretch a little further.



### *Good places to stretch*

The multitude of joints in the body make it possible to do a large variety of joint manipulations and stretches in many areas such as the toes, ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and hands. You find out about a few all-time favorite stretches in the chapters to come.

## *Massage moves in a nutshell*

Here are some simple general guidelines that you can apply to all the preceding maneuvers and use in every massage you give:

- ✓ **Follow the contour:** When in doubt about what particular move to make, just trace the body's outlines with your fingers for a few moments, applying pressure according to what you feel. It's better to keep moving in a constant flow rather than stop and say something like, "Now, what was that next maneuver again?" This can be annoying to your partner.
- ✓ **Do no harm:** Don't press too hard or work on areas that may be too delicate, such as sprains, strains, or scar tissues soon after injuries. Of course, avoid all contraindicated areas and conditions. Ask for a physician's advice if there is anything that gives you concern.
- ✓ **Stay in the moment:** The easiest way to look at a massage is piece by piece. Concentrate on one movement at a time, and one area. Work on just that leg first, and worry about what you're going to do on the arm later. One move at a time, one after another, creates a whole massage.

### **A ticklish situation**

Some people out there will flat-out refuse to even consider the possibility of getting a massage because they're afraid they would giggle so hard they would fall right off the table. These folks consider themselves "ticklish," but what is a ticklish person anyway? Most of us are sensitive when we get poked in the ribs or stroked lightly on the bottom of the feet, but some people claim any kind of touch at all elicits the "tickle response."

When someone complains of being overly ticklish, you can follow these steps to help them get over it:

1. First, explain that surface tension in the muscles causes excessive ticklishness.
2. Explain that you are going to get "underneath" this layer by applying firm pressure that affects tissues below.
3. Gradually apply pressure with as broad a surface as possible, for example, your entire palm instead of your fingers.
4. After you "sink down" to a depth that is not ticklish anymore, make your movements slow and steady, gently rocking back and forth, pulsing up and down. Avoid kneading, pressing, and vibration.
5. Move slowly from one area to another, staying away from the areas your partner reports as most seriously ticklish.
6. If your partner shows any signs of discomfort, discontinue movement and simply apply steady firm pressure.

## The Massage Dance

So, you may be asking yourself, what am I supposed to be doing with the rest of my body while my hands are massaging someone? Good question. Can you guess the right answer?

- It doesn't matter, as long as you remain in a generally upright position and don't fall asleep.
- Something constructive, such as learning a foreign language with audio-cassettes, because otherwise you're just wasting your time.
- Absolutely nothing; stay as stiff and still as possible so you don't distract the person you are massaging.
- Make every move a "whole body move" by engaging your entire self in what you're doing, turning the massage into a dance.



The answer, of course, is "D." In fact, it's so important to use your entire body properly while giving a massage that massage pros have given this practice a name — *body mechanics*.

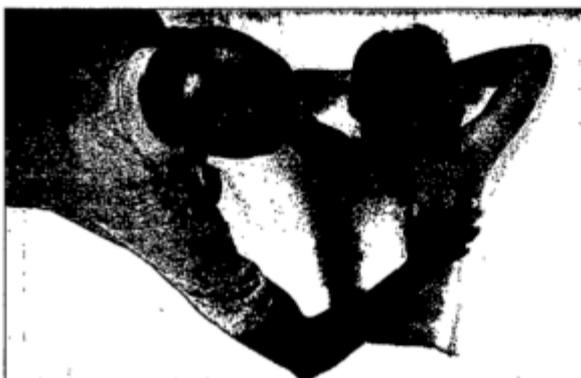
It may seem like a lot of extra effort at first, but in the long run it's easier if you use proper body mechanics and engage your entire body while giving a massage rather than relying on the strength of your arms and shoulders alone. Actually, using your arms and shoulders alone is guaranteed to burn you out really quickly. You may end up saying something like "This is WAY too difficult." Then you may quit, offering muscle-fatigue as an excuse to your partner after just ten minutes.



Here are a few guidelines to help you fine-tune your body mechanics:

- ✓ **Root yourself:** Your movements should feel like they're coming from the place where your body is rooted to the earth. Don't get off balance and lose your center of power. You need to ground yourself enough so that it's difficult to knock you over when you're giving a massage.
- ✓ **Move from below:** Whether you're standing or kneeling down next to your partner to give the massage, generate your movements from your legs and hips, not just your upper body, as shown in Figure 10-13.
- ✓ **Maintain straight lines:** When you apply pressure, do it in a straight line from your shoulders down to your fingertips. Bending your joints and then applying pressure puts extra pressure on your thumbs, wrists, and elbows, and should be avoided. Figure 10-14 shows you what I'm talking about.

**Figure 10-13:**  
If you're standing, keep your knees soft and move from your hips. If you're kneeling, still move from your hips.



**Figure 10-14:**  
The wrong way (top) and the right way (bottom) to apply pressure.



- ✓ **Be kind to your thumbs and wrists:** Thumbs take the biggest beating when giving a massage, and wrists come in a close second. Be extra careful not to rely only on these delicate instruments to do your heavy-duty massage work. Give them a break every once in a while by using your knuckles and forearms.
- ✓ **Lean a lot:** Instead of straining your muscles to get the job done, use your body weight. Simply LEAN on the person you're massaging by placing your center of gravity several inches away from her, then falling forward and supporting yourself on her body. This takes a little practice because our civilized instincts tell us not to use other people's bodies as counter tops. Go ahead and try it, though. It saves you a lot of work.

## Massage Gizmos

Ever wander around inside one of those expensive gadget gift shops like the Sharper Image and suddenly realize that about a quarter of the inventory is massage gizmos of one kind or another? They have vibrating chairs, tables with rollers built in, and devices to buzz you, press you, knead you, jab you, and squeeze you. Seeing all this, you can definitely come to a couple very important conclusions:

- ✓ Massage gizmos are a great way for manufacturers and retailers to make lots of money.
- ✓ Massage gizmos are a great way for you to spend lots of money.

So, naturally, the question comes to mind — are they worth it? In my opinion, most of them are. And, fortunately, they don't all cost tons of money either. You can get a nifty little massage device at your local pharmacy for \$12.95.

There are three main reasons why people use massage gizmos:

1. They're fun and kind of neat looking.
2. They can help save your hands a lot of work.
3. They actually make you feel better.

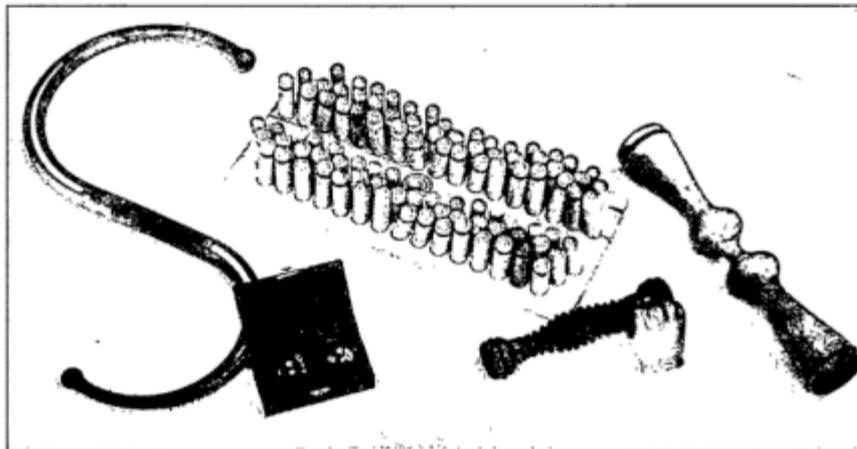
Often, people overlook reason number 3. This is strange, because that's the whole point of using them, right? The little gizmos can really make you feel better, but you should also exercise the same cautions and observe the same contraindications when using them as you do when using your fingers.

Before you go out and purchase your own massage tool, I have a little secret for you, and you have to promise not to tell anyone else. Ready? Here it is:

JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING FEELS GOOD WHEN IT'S RUBBED AGAINST YOUR BODY! THE SECRET IS NOT THE TOOL, BUT THE TOUCH.

Whoops, I said that kind of loudly, didn't I? Maybe even some of the gizmo makers heard. But it's true. Don't take my word for it. Go out in the backyard and grab a smooth, palm-sized rock. Wash it off, of course. Then have someone take a rounded end and gently rub it against your back muscles. Wow! Feels fantastic, doesn't it?

The truth is that you don't really need these custom-made massage doohick-eyes, but all sorts of neat designs are out there, and some of them, admittedly, feel quite a bit better than rocks from your backyard. The ones that apply vibration and pressure are especially effective. Everybody should have at least one such gizmo in his or her home. But which one are you going to choose when there are so many shapes and sizes available, as shown in Figure 10-15? This section attempts to make a little sense of the whole massage device market for you by breaking it down into three categories: gravity-assisted gizmos, pressure tools, and mechanical devices.



**Figure 10-15:**  
The choice  
of massage  
gizmos con-  
tinues to  
grow.

## Gravity-assisted gizmos

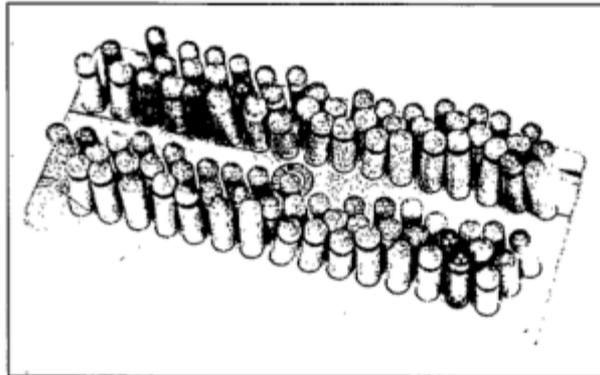
These tools utilize your own weight to massage various parts of your body:



- ✓ **Foot rollers:** There are many of these, and most of them look basically like wooden cigars: stubby, brown, and round. Some have grooves etched into their surface, and others have a series of interconnected rolling balls. By running your feet over them, you stimulate nerve endings and *reflexology* points (see Chapter 14 for more on this). You can even buy sandals with hundreds of tiny knobs on the soles that massage your feet as you walk.

- ✓ **Back rollers:** Several versions are available. They look similar to the rolling pin your mom used to use to make pie crusts. The most famous is the Ma Roller, which has two bumps in the center that are placed on either side of your spine. The instructions say not to roll your back down over the knobs, but that's what everyone does, because that's what feels the best and has the most profound effect. Be careful when using these not to accidentally roll hard wood onto your spine itself.
- ✓ **Stretchers:** We all need to stretch, and sometimes we could use a little help from devices like the "body bridge" which is basically a curved table that you bend over backwards on, letting gravity do the stretching.
- ✓ **Body Balancer:** A massage pro named Grace Apfel in California, trying to recreate the support and flexibility she offered clients with her own hands, created the device shown in Figure 10-16. You fill the holes with pegs of different heights that you adjust to your particular needs, then lie down upon them and just relax. It's a good way to let gravity do the work in easing some of your back pains for you.

**Figure 10-16:** Massage gizmos have become more and more elaborate in recent years.



## Pressure tools



All sorts of devices are available now that you rub on the body with varying degrees of pressure. You can get them in specialty shops, but they're increasingly available in more common outlets such as drug stores. Basically, they stimulate *acupressure* points and trigger points. You can use them to exert pressure on tough knots and sore spots. But be careful: The materials used in these tools are usually hard, like stone or wood. Just a little pressure goes a long way.



- ✓ **Little knobby things:** Many little odd-shaped items are now sold that you're supposed to rub across your body (or somebody else's body) for fun, pleasure, and relief from stress. Some of them even have names and personalities, like the Happy Massager from the Tender Loving Things Company, Inc. or the Dolphin Massager. You can even order a Handy massage tool from the back of this book, designed by yours truly. It's a hand-shaped instrument with a perky personality that you can use when your own hands are too tired or not in the mood to give a massage. All of these utilize the same simple concept: Pressing on people makes them feel better. Try them, you'll like them.
- ✓ **"Captain Hook" devices:** Ever wish you could rubberize your arms and reach around to massage a knot in the middle of your back? That, in essence, is what these curved devices allow you to do. You can use them to hook onto otherwise unreachable tight spots on your posterior surface. Popular brands include the Backnobber and the Thera Cane.
- ✓ **Professional pressure tools:** There are certain tools that you can only get in massage clinics that are meant for professional use. One particular device looks like a sharpened pencil eraser stuck into the side of a wooden peg. Neuromuscular therapists use them to work on deep tissues. If you find professional tools somewhere, you're better off not buying them. They can cause harm if not used by skilled hands.
- ✓ **Rubbing gloves:** Several brands of textured gloves are now available. You slip them on and then apply pressure and friction over the skin. The gloves both *exfoliate* the skin and stimulate nerve endings. They feel great, too.

## Mechanical devices

There are many mechanical devices on the market that utilize electricity to create vibration and kneading actions. They range in price from just a few bucks to major capital investments.

- ✓ **Thumper:** This is probably the best-known in its class, and its name says it all. It gives a heavy thumping action that simulates a pair of "chopping" hands. Great for after workouts or to combat chronic tension, but it ain't cheap.
- ✓ **Vibrating doohickeys:** Dozens of these line the shelves, and there's always one that has batteries and is available to test. That's because the manufacturers know that they feel great and that you may want to take one home when you feel it for yourself. That's a good tactic. However, after you get home, these items tend to see more use as conversation starters than therapeutic devices.

- ✓ **Shiatsu massager:** This type of unit has kneading “fingers” built into it. You put it behind you in a chair and lean back against it. According to many reports, they can work wonders. Greg, a journalist friend of mine, swears by his. He has a back problem that is exacerbated by long hours sitting at the computer, and he credits his Shiatsu massager for saving his career.
- ✓ **Massage furniture:** Panasonic and other well-known manufacturers have gotten in on the massage game with electronic chairs and tables that give you a massage while you recline on them. These are fun items to have around the house, but the novelty often wears off pretty quickly, and before too long you’re left with a slightly odd lumpy piece of expensive furniture.

### *The best gizmo of all*

When it comes to any of these gadgets, the bottom line is this — they are fun, helpful, and neat, but no amount of technology or ingenuity can create a tool more adaptable, powerful, or sensitive than the human hand. Even the device makers themselves know this. Living Earth Crafts, one of the largest massage manufacturers in the world, has a slogan: “There is no substitute for the human touch.”



Tom Myers, a famed anatomy teacher and structural massage expert, agrees. Holding his own hand up for inspection, he often comments, “Twenty-five-million years in the making. Hard to beat that kind of engineering.”

## Chapter 11

# Putting the Moves Together

.....

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Setting up
  - ▶ Oil's well that ends well
  - ▶ Massage rules
  - ▶ The massage
- .....

**I** was recently watching an episode of the sitcom *Friends* on TV, and one of the main themes of the show concerned the effects of massage on friendships and relationships. The Monica character thought she gave a great backrub, but her boyfriend Chandler thought otherwise. The whole show centered on how he should break the bad news to her.

We humans are sensitive creatures, and when we give something as personal as a massage to someone else, we're making ourselves vulnerable to his or her judgement. What if they don't like our technique? What if they don't like *us*?

When you give of yourself through massage, it's natural to be afraid of what people may think and to wonder, secretly, if you're doing it *right* or if you're *good enough*.

I think you should forget all about that stuff. Your massage abilities are not something to be proud of, or ashamed of. Your abilities are something you should share.

As long as you tune in and become sensitive to your partner, you can give a good massage. The idea is not to focus on *being* good, but to focus on *doing* good.

If Monica had not been so proud in the beginning, she wouldn't have forced her own concept of what she thought was good onto her boyfriend, which set the stage for her to feel rejected and ashamed later.

Be sensitive. Tune in. Do good. If you do these things, you never have time to worry about whether you're good or not. As long as your heart is into what you're doing, you're guaranteed to do it the *right* way.

## Setting Up

First, you need to go over just a few preliminaries to make sure you're set up and ready to go. I assume that you've created a suitable *inner chamber* for your massage experience and that you've practiced a few moves from Chapter 10. You know what to do and what not to do, and now you just have to get yourself ready and do it.

### Table for one?

One thing you may notice is that the massage in this chapter is being given on the floor. It's pretty much guaranteed that you have a floor available someplace to work on, right? But there's a good chance you don't have a massage table like the ones the pros use. For those of you not familiar with them, massage tables are oblong, folding, padded tables. Most of them have legs of adjustable height, like the one in Figure 11-1. These tables are great tools, and if you get serious about massage at some point, you may want to consider investing in one. New ones cost a few hundred dollars.

**Figure 11-1:**  
Massage  
tables look  
like folding,  
adjustable-  
height,  
oblong,  
upholstered  
card tables.



The floor can be quite a comfortable place to get a massage, especially if you add a few pillows, a sofa cushion or two, plus a sheet and towels, as you can see in Figure 11-2.

**Figure 11-2:**  
You can  
create a  
perfectly  
comfortable  
massage  
space on  
the floor.



Many massages have been given on beds, but in those cases the massage often leads to other activities — like sleeping! That's right, it's very tempting for the giver to just roll over and lounge around instead of working like he should. When you do give a massage on a bed, arrange some towels near the foot or along one edge, so that you don't have to be up on the bed yourself the whole time you're giving the massage.

## *Sheets, towels, and so on*

Don't use your best sheets and towels to do a massage on because the oils and creams can leave stains and a musty oil smell behind. Also, the color white seems to show off oil stains the most. Many spas use darker colored linens, like green or blue, for this reason.

Other things you may want to have around include heating pads, blankets, bottle warmers, and other such comfort-creating devices. Nothing's worse than getting a massage and not being able to concentrate on how good it feels because you're shivering the whole time.



It's also a good idea to have some extra pillows to use as *bolsters* for support beneath your partner. Massage pros use specially made bolsters, as mentioned in Chapter 8, but you can use normal pillows just as effectively. If you use one of your nice pillows, it's a good idea to cover it with a towel to keep it from getting stained by oil.

## Oil's Well That Ends Well

Yes, it's true. Massage can be an oily endeavor. In fact, in some countries, such as India, oil plays a major part in the whole procedure, and about half way through a massage people in Delhi end up glistening with a layer of lubricant. This is okay (as long as you have lots of towels around to sop up the extra oil afterwards). In fact, the Indian system prescribes large amounts of oil — usually sesame oil — on purpose for its lubricating and detoxifying effects. The common wisdom in most other countries, however, is that you should use just enough lubricant to, well, lubricate.

This is how you best use oil during a massage:



1. **First, choose the oil (see the sidebar later in this chapter).**
2. **Second, make sure the oil is not cold.**

When you apply cold oil to your partner's skin, it may cause her to hit you or kick you, which is not desirable. The best way to warm the oil is to place the bottle in hot running water for a few minutes, or use a baby bottle warmer, until the oil is warm to the touch. Don't microwave the oil, which can potentially overheat it, causing an equally adverse reaction from your partner.

3. **Cup one palm and pour a small amount of oil into it.**

Ideally, you want to keep the back of your cupped palm in contact with your partner so that you maintain a constant connection. The amount of oil depends on the size of the area you are massaging, the amount of body hair in the area, and the maneuvers you plan to use. You may have to experiment a few times to get the amount right.

4. **Rub your palms together for a few seconds to further warm the oil and then glide your hands over the skin, spreading a smooth layer of oil over the whole surface you are massaging.**

The correct amount is the amount that leaves the skin lubricated, but no puddles of oil or "greasy" spots.



### Getting creamed

Skin creams and lotions are a good alternative to oil, and in fact many professional massage therapists would not be caught using anything else. Cream absorbs more quickly into the skin

than oil, so you don't slide around so much. Good ones leave a lubricating layer that makes it easy to work. A lot of pros choose a brand called Biotonè.

## Bottle placement

There is an age-old feud that has gone on between massage therapists for decades over where to place the oil bottle during the massage. I know that this may seem silly to you, but you can rest assured that it's a debate taken very seriously by otherwise intelligent adults. There are basically two camps — those that propose placing the bottle next to the person, where it's handy but liable to get knocked over; and those that propose keeping the bottle out of harm's way, on the floor for example, where it's harder to reach but less likely to get kicked or spilled. Some people go as far as to keep their oil bottles in a specially made holster strung around their waist like a six-gun. This gives the average massage therapist a Wyatt Earp kind of look that is perhaps not ideal for inducing relaxation.

Where should you put the bottle of oil during a massage? In my professional opinion, speaking as a massage therapist who's been working in the field for almost 20 years, it doesn't really matter. Whatever's most comfortable for you is best.



The type of bottle (and especially the cap) does matter, though. You can make things much easier for yourself if you choose a squeeze-top type cap that pours a tiny bit of oil at a time. Pump tops work well, too. If you use a wide-mouth opening, chances are you may end up with oil all over the place, especially if you have your massage area dimly lit with candles.

## Your own oil blends



You can incorporate the concepts of aromatherapy into your massage by adding a few drops of *essential oil* to the oil you're already using, which is then called the *carrier oil*. Typical carrier oils include grapeseed, sweet almond, jojoba, avocado, and sesame, which are all good as a base for the essential oils. To make your own aromatherapy oil, blend two dozen drops of essential oil with 2 ounces of carrier oil. For added aromatherapy benefits, place a few drops in a *diffuser* to fill the room you're in with the same scent you're using for the massage, as I suggest in Chapter 9.

Table 11-1 lists the essential oils I use in my spa therapy workshops and a description of their basic effects:

Table 11-1 Essential oils	
<i>Oil</i>	<i>Properties</i>
Cedar	Reduces fluids in body tissues, diuretic. Warming in baths.
Clary sage	Balances female hormones. Good for scalp problems.

(continued)

<i>Oil</i>	<i>Properties</i>
Eucalyptus radiata	Excellent for lungs, respiratory system. Muscle tonic.
Geranium rose	Balances the skin by affecting sebum. Balances emotions, too.
Juniper	Calming and purifying.
Lavender	Anti-bacterial (first-aid kit in a bottle), calming, good for skin.
Lemon grass	Stimulates digestion. Antiseptic, detoxifies lymph. Uplifting.
Orange	Mood elevator.
Peppermint	Stimulates alertness. Good for headaches, colds.
Pine	Pain killer. Natural deodorant.
Rose	Excellent for the skin.
Rosemary	Hair tonic. Astringent. Good for oily skin.
Sandalwood	Grounding and relaxing. Spiritually uplifting. Aids aging skin.
Tea tree	Antiseptic, antifungal, antibacterial. Good for the skin.
Vetiver	Grounding and calming.
Ylang ylang	Aphrodisiac. Relieves tension/stress. Balances dry skin.

## The Rules for Giving Massage

Just as there were some rules for receiving, there are rules for giving, too. For the most part, these are things I've mentioned all along throughout the previous chapters, but it helps if you review them here, right before you actually begin giving a massage.

- 1. Do no harm.** This is the number one rule for giving a massage. Refer to Chapter 10 and make sure you're aware of the moves that you shouldn't make, the places that you shouldn't press, and the conditions you shouldn't treat.
- 2. Think 3-D.** Refer to Chapter 4 and try to visualize the physical structures beneath the skin that you're affecting with your hands during the massage.
- 3. Use your whole body.** Remember to use correct *body mechanics* (see Chapter 10) in order to save your own body from overexertion while applying just the right amount of pressure for your partner.

## So many oils, so little time

Walk into any bath and body shop or health food store and you see at least a dozen choices in massage oils. Which is the best one, you ask? Is it the special formula designed by the spiritual healer Edgar Cayce who “received” the recipe while in a trance? Or is it the “mango tango” scented blend that your favorite boutique down the street recently released?

Several oils available straight from the shelf in your local grocery store are usable, if not ideal, for massage. Almond oil is used in spas around the world, and you can use sesame oil and olive oil, too. But the special oils formulated just for massage really are better. They have more nutrients for the skin, and they create just the right amount of lubrication. In my opinion, it’s worth the extra money you spend to get a high-quality massage oil.

There are a few things you want to look for when choosing an oil:

- ✓ **Ingredients:** Check the ingredients. A common addition to several oil blends, for example, is lanolin, which comes from an animal source and turns some people off.
- ✓ **Scent:** Make sure the scent is not overpowering or synthetic.
- ✓ **Viscosity:** Everyone has his or her own preference as far as the right viscosity goes. “Thin” oils, such as mineral oil, feel a little watery and spread unevenly. This is not recommended. “Thick” oils like coconut leave a “greasy” feeling. Test a little on your palm before buying to find an oil somewhere in the middle of this spectrum that works for you.

4. **Focus on the other.** This is no time to be thinking about politics, sports, the weather, or your upcoming turn to receive. As fully as you can, focus on your partner, what she’s feeling, and how you can make her feel better.
5. **Go out of your mind.** After you figure out the moves, practice the technique, and focus on your partner with all your concentration, then you can stop thinking. That’s right. Let go of your extraneous thoughts, and even your thoughts about doing a good job.
6. **Get creative.** Go ahead, go crazy; just let yourself feel whatever you’re feeling and go with your intuition. Want to leave one palm on your partner’s forehead and the other on her stomach completely motionless for ten minutes? That’s probably exactly what she needs. As long as what you’re doing is generated from caring and commitment to your partner, it is going to be the right thing.
7. **Let love flow.** Certain people develop an ability to send a very distinct and palpable sensation of love into their fingers and palms. You can feel it when they touch you. Everyone else has the potential to develop that ability. Why not use massage as an opportunity to explore your own innate abilities to send a powerful message of caring to others through your touch and presence? There are worse ways you could spend your time.

## The Massage



Okay, here it is, the moment you've all been waiting for. You can only talk about it for so long without realizing that massage is not really about talking, it's about feeling. And as Bob Marley once said, "He who feels it, knows it."

Soon, you are going to be sailing away toward hours of massage bliss. All you have to do to get started is follow these five easy steps:

- ✓ Cleanliness first
- ✓ Take your positions
- ✓ Invocation
- ✓ The force, Luke, remember the force
- ✓ The first touch

### Cleanliness first

You're all set up, the mood is right, the lights are low, and now, before you do anything else, there's one critical procedure you must follow before starting the massage — wash your hands!

### Good hands

What does it mean to have "good hands?" It's the one quality that millions of massage lovers around the world use to describe the essence of an excellent massage therapist. As in, "Oh, that was the best massage I ever had. You have got great hands." But, because that quality is so vague, it's a little difficult to reproduce or teach to someone else. Good hands? What does that mean?

Having good hands, as it turns out, is not really about your hands. It's about *YOU*. It's the way

you focus on your partner, the way you become sensitive to her, and the way you care. It's also about following some very simple guidelines, which I call the "rules for giving massage." You can find those rules right here in this chapter.

Follow these simple principles, and you may even go beyond having good hands to having "great hands" one day.



## But do I have to cut my nails?

Once I was hired to present a massage workshop at a huge annual convention of nail technicians (manicurists) in Detroit. I never knew so many manicurists existed before. Demonstrating some basic massage moves on the feet of one class member, I then told them to exchange similar moves. Soon, the room was filled with sounds of pain and discomfort.

These women had nails an inch and a half long. Sharp nails. Some of them had holes drilled in the ends of their nails, and miniature charm bracelets dangled through them. It was impossible for them to practice massage.

If you have long nails, it's going to be awfully hard for you to give a good massage. One of the first things people are told when they sign up for

massage school is to cut their nails, and you can often tell a massage pro by her extremely short and neatly trimmed nails.

Does this mean you have to lop off your own dearly beloved nails in order to give a massage? Not necessarily. If your husband is the only person you're going to be massaging, and he likes it when you run your long nails down his back, don't worry about cutting them. You can improvise massage moves by using your palms and the bottoms of your fingers, keeping your nails lifted up out of the way. However, if your nails are long and your intention is to get better at massage and perform all the moves described here to their fullest, you have some serious clipping to do in your near future.



Washing cleanses away dirt and grime, and it also protects you and your partner from nasty bacteria. It's a good habit to get into.

## Take your positions

To begin the massage, you and your partner both have to be in the right positions. In the routine shown in this chapter, you start with your partner lying on her back, and you sit up near her head.



Some people are sticklers about this whole positioning issue, but I don't believe in starting every massage in the same position every time. In fact, starting over and over again in the same position can lead to complacency and a boring massage. It's better to begin each massage where you are drawn to begin by your intuition, your partner's suggestion, and your observation. Is she all hunched over by tight back muscles? Then by all means start the massage with her facedown, working on her back. The sequence of the massage shown in this chapter is not the only way.

## Invocation



You may recall that in Chapter 5, I describe a massage I received from Wesley, who's a native Hawaiian massage therapist and healer on the Big Island. What I didn't describe was the prayer Wesley used to begin the massage, sitting humbly on the floor beside me, melodiously intoning some words in Hawaiian: "*Kou makou makua iloko okalani.*"

This invocation was meant to make both Wesley and me at one with the source of life. He learned it from his teacher, Auntie Margaret, and she in turn was taught it by her elders.



Although you may feel a little funny at first, it may be appropriate for you to say a couple of words of invocation as you're about to start your massage. They don't have to be in Hawaiian; something simple is fine, such as, "I summon the powers of healing and wholeness to be with us during this massage." Just say them from your heart, and you get your message across.

## The Force, Luke, remember the Force



Remember, you're not just dealing with a pile of flesh and bones here. Your partner is more than a series of points to be pushed and muscles to be kneaded. She has a magical inner spark, too. According to many massage philosophies, especially those from the East like *Shiatsu*, the body is filled with invisible pathways that are pulsing with this inner energy, variously known as *chi*, *ki*, *prana*, *universal-life-force-energy*, and *the-force-Luke-remember-the-force*.

You can give a better massage if you simply stop for a moment at the beginning of the massage and focus on that force that exists within you and your partner. Remember the scenes from *Star Wars* when Luke was zeroing in on the Death Star using nothing but his intuition? The voice of his mentor was there in his head all along urging him to "remember the force." Tune into your own inner guidance as you begin the massage, and you may surprise yourself with how well you do.

## The first touch

This is the crucial moment, when all of your preparation and practice is put to the test. Ninety-five percent of what your partner needs to know about your massage is completely obvious in the first split second, with the very first touch. At this juncture, you go forward into the realm of being and doing rather than thinking, and a new thing is created, the massage.

Reaching both hands down, place them gently and consciously on your partner's back, as if you were touching a sleeping child and trying not to wake her. Put one up on the top of the spine near the head, and the other down by the base of the spine. Then just touch for a moment, with no need to move. You can actually summon the "force, Luke," and say your invocation at this time, too. (See Figure 11-3.)



**Figure 11-3:**  
After you  
summon the  
forces  
within,  
reach out  
and touch  
someone.

Hold this position for a minute, with your hands on your partner's spine, simply communicating your presence and loving intentions.

Then you can begin.

**Note:** You may notice that I haven't included any stretches in this chapter. That's because I explain stretches in the sports massage section of Chapter 16. This doesn't mean you can't use them during your full body massage, too, though. In fact, I highly recommend stretches. After you master some of the stretches, sprinkle them liberally throughout your massage for optimum effect.

## *The back*

The back is a great place to begin a massage because many people equate massage with a "back rub." Although it looks large and solid, the back is actually prone to lots of little aches and pains, and much of the tension and everyday complaints people have can be found there. Thus the famous phrase, "Oh, my aching back." And finally, the back is the least vulnerable area to touch someone, psychologically speaking, so people are more likely to relax and "let you in" when you begin there.

1. Without moving your hands from the position they're in, simply begin to rock your partner gently from side to side, by using the tailbone as a kind of handle for the heel of your hand. When you get good at it, you can extend your rocking maneuvers further up the back and down onto the buttocks and even the legs. The idea is to get a wave-like motion going through your partner's body so that she starts to melt into the floor.



When you want to get someone out of the mood they were just in, and into the mood of getting a massage, nothing beats rocking.

2. People either love skin rolling, or they really don't like it at all, so you have to experiment a little and ask your partner how it feels. Start by getting a grasp on the skin at the base of the neck between your thumb and your first two fingers, then "walk" this roll down the back, keeping it between your fingers the whole time. This takes some practice, so start with a partner who doesn't mind playing guinea pig.
3. Use your fingertips to "hook" into the muscles alongside the spine near the tailbone. Then start vibrating your hand while dragging it with medium pressure back up toward your partner's head, as in Figure 11-4a. Repeat this three times.
4. This long gliding movement spreads oil and further warms up the entire area. See the section on oil earlier in this chapter for the proper oil-spreading technique. Glide down with both hands on the muscles on either side of the spine, with your fingers pointed in toward the middle. When you reach the base of the spine, swivel your fingers toward the outside and glide back up as shown in Figure 11-4b. Repeat this gliding four or five times, using light pressure at first and then slightly firmer pressure.
5. When you reach the base of the spine on the fourth or fifth glide, stop and apply circular rubbing all over the sacrum, or tail bone, as shown in Figure 11-4c. You may notice that when your partner is lying down this bone is tilted in such a way that it presents a relatively flat surface, so you can lean your weight forward from your partner's head and apply pressure to it.
6. For this next move, start with your thumbs at the top of your partner's back, one thumb on either side of the spine. Then push your thumbs down along the "ridge" of the erector spinae muscles *very slowly*, with medium to firm pressure, as in Figure 11-4d. This should take 30 seconds or more. When you get to a tight "spot," slow down and let your thumbs sink into it even more slowly, making a mental note to revisit this area later. Remember to use proper *body mechanics* so you don't overstrain your joints while pushing. After you reach the base of the spine, glide your way back to the top.



