

# Massage Guidelines During Treatment for Cancer

## What your Massage Therapist NEEDS TO KNOW:

BY Toni Muirhead@ [www.acaringtouchforcancer.com](http://www.acaringtouchforcancer.com)

Please feel free to print this and take it with you to your doctor and massage therapist. It will provide them with the necessary guidelines to ensure the safe practice of massage during and after cancer treatment.

### Recommended

- Whenever possible locate a Massage Therapist that has been trained in safe practices of cancer and massage during treatment.
- If you have a port or recent surgery that needs extra pillows for your comfort, ask for them. A trained Massage Therapist can safely work around a port and support you with bolsters so that you are comfortable during your massage.
- If you are taking any medication during your treatment that affects your bones and tissues be sure to mention this to your massage therapist. Also, be aware that pain medicines can affect your perception of pain. Other medicines can increase bruising, increase possibility of blood clots, and may cause you to be susceptible to tissue injury.
- Massage Therapists may not know the effects of all medications, so it is helpful if you are aware of the side effects. Whenever possible give your Massage Therapist the opportunity to research your medication. This will help them give you a safe massage.
- If you are currently in treatment and your blood counts are low: platelet counts, white blood counts, red blood counts, massage pressure may need to be modified and appointment time possibly rescheduled.
- If you are in radiation treatment—avoid treatment area and possibly even the back exit area of radiation, healing wounds or dermatitis should be avoided.
- You can help your Massage Therapist during your treatment if there is a clear understanding of your energy level.
  - Are you able to work during treatment?
  - Do you still maintain an exercise program?
  - Do you have any pain during your radiation treatment when you elevate your arm?
  - Have you had any recent diagnostic test or surgical procedures that caused you concern or physical discomfort?

Knowing the answers to these questions can help your Massage Therapist create the best massage during your treatment.

## Not Recommended

- If you have bone disease – strong pressure is not recommended over areas of weak bones. Be sure to tell your therapist if you have bone disease.
- If you have had lymph nodes removed: Avoid deep pressure on your affected limb. Too many patients believe that it is perfectly fine during treatment and even after treatment is completed to get the same type of massage they had before treatment. Yet they are very aware that blood pressures or needles in their affected limb must be avoided. <http://www.lymphnet.org>
- Deep tissue massage
- Hot stones
- Exfoliation treatments
- Herbal wraps are not recommended during treatment.

## Tips:

- Try to schedule prior to chemotherapy and avoid time right after treatment. Wait until you are feeling better. The effects of massage can be fatiguing and you don't need anything else to fatigue you during your treatment.
- You may be especially sensitive to smells or lotions during chemotherapy. Lotions should be free of strong fragrances. Even if your Massage Therapist uses a scent free lotion, realize that the smell from previous massages may linger in the room. Plan your massage early in the day to avoid lingering smells in the room.
- You are done with chemotherapy but still going for other treatments that have side effects that cause you discomfort, talk to your physician regarding the benefits of massage.

By understanding the importance of this massage information and communicating it with your Massage Therapist, you can have a much-needed safe respite from your treatment. A massage, which allows you to relax, restore and have a sense of, remembered wellness can be enjoyed if delivered correctly.

Please request permission to reprint segments for distribution, teaching or in-service purposes and credit author on each page.