

## FAST FACTS: Non-Drug Treatment: Massage

Massage is provided by either using mechanical devices (personal massagers) or through the hands of an individual by using light pressure to rub, stroke, or knead parts of the body. Massage works by soothing pain and relaxing tense muscles, addressing specific locations of pain, or relaxing the whole body and improving circulation.



### ✓ Massage Application Guidelines

- **DON'T**
  - Do not use massage if it increases pain
  - Do not massage areas being treated with radiation
    - Skin is more fragile
    - Should not put lotions or powders on the treated area
    - If being treated for bone metastases (cancer has spread to bones), bones are at higher risk for fracture or bone pain
  - Do not massage over open wounds
    - Possibility of infection
    - Risk of interrupting healing
  - Do not massage legs without checking with healthcare professional to ensure this is appropriate for your loved ones
  - Do not massage an area with a blood clot, as these could become dislodged and block the bloodstream
  - Do not massage areas with bedsores because massage could cause further damage
- **DO**
  - Do assess your loved one's preference for touch before massaging.
  - Do massage for 5-20 minutes using light pressure and a steady stroke.
  - Do use lotion or essential oil to reduce friction against skin while also moisturizing. However, skip if your loved one cannot tolerate the lotion or oil.
  - Do schedule at specific time of day as it gives your loved one something to look forward to.
- **CAREFUL USE**
  - Use caution in older adults prone to skin tears or bedsores
  - Use caution over bony body areas as this may be uncomfortable or even painful

**✓ Directions**

1. Using warm lotion or essential oil (if these can be tolerated), gently move hands over painful area using a consistent motion. The use of warm lotion is particularly calming.
2. If using a personal massager, be sure to follow the instructions that came with the device. Use light pressure to move the massager over the affected area. You can teach your loved one how to self-massage using the device if they can reach to affected area.

**✓ Notes**

- Ensure you are trained appropriately prior to implementing the use of massage. Speak with a professional or your loved one's healthcare provider to determine correct technique or where to find additional training if needed.

**✓ What Else You Should Do**

- Write down and share information about your loved one's pain with their healthcare provider.
- Use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to the healthcare provider.
- Encourage your loved one to try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on their pain in their Pain Diary.

*Revised January 2022*

**References**

Adapted from: Beth Miller-Kraybill, Nondrug Pain & Symptom Management in Nursing Assistant End of Life: Computerized Educational Program. 2. The Nursing Home Pain Management Algorithm Clinical Trial, R01 NR009100, 7/1/05 – 4/30/10; Mary Ersek (PI).

Mayo Clinic, January 2, 2021. *Massage: Get in touch with its many benefits.*

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/massage/art-20045743>.

WebMD, 2020. *Massage Therapy Styles and Health Benefits.*

<https://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/massage-therapy-styles-and-health-benefits>.