

Non-pharmacological Pain and Symptom Management

MASSAGE

Massage – Massage is provided using mechanical devices (e.g., handheld 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
- Improving circulation

Licensed Massage Therapists provide in-depth modalities which are not detailed in this document. Licenses and certifications may vary among states.

Massage application guidelines:

DO NOT:

- Use massage if it increases pain.
- Massage areas being treated with radiation.
 - Skin is more fragile
 - No lotions or powders on the area
 - If being treated for bone metastases, bones are at higher risk for fracture or increasing bone pain
- Massage over open wounds because of the
 - Possibility of infection
 - Risk of interrupting healing
- Massage lower extremities without evaluating history and risk for developing blood clots.
- Massage areas with blood clots as these could become emboli.
- Massage areas with pressure injuries because massage could cause further damage.

DO:

- Assess comfort level and preference for touch before massaging (e.g., including those with cognitive impairment to determine if massage can be implemented).
- Massage for 5-20 minutes using light pressure and a steady stroke.
- Ask for feedback on pressure, depth, and stroke style, while paying close attention to the older adult's body language.
- Quiet the environment before administering a massage and eliminate as many distractions as possible during the massage.
- Use warm lotions or essential oils if not contraindicated as this helps reduce friction against skin and moisturizes skin simultaneously.
- Schedule massage at a specific time of day as this gives the person something to look forward to.
- Can be done at the time of analgesic administration.

CAUTION:

- Use caution in older adults prone to skin tears or pressure injuries.
- Use caution over bony prominences as this may be uncomfortable/painful.

- Requires no special equipment unless using a handheld personal massager.
- Lotions or essential oils. The use of warm lotion is particularly calming. Lotion can be warmed in bath basin or under running water.

Directions/Procedure:

1. **Pressure:** Vary the pressure, based on the older adult's preference, by using different parts of your hand (e.g., the pads of the fingers versus the palm of the hand). Less pressure is needed to affect smaller muscle groups, like those in the hand, than the long muscles of the thigh or back.
2. **Motion:** Movements can be circular, or across or along the length of the muscles.
3. **Speed:** Slow, steady strokes feel different than fast, chopping strokes. Vary strokes according to the older adult's preference.
4. If using a handheld personal massage, follow instructions accompanying device. Use light pressure to move the massager over affected area. Teach older adults and or family members how to use, clean and store the device.

NOTE: The clinician should only administer non-pharmacological therapies that are within their particular scope of practice. Follow the organizations policies and procedures regarding administration of these therapies.

Revised April 2023

References

Antonelli M, Donelli D. Efficacy, Safety and Tolerability of Aroma Massage with Lavender Essential Oil: an Overview. *Int J Ther Massage Bodywork*. 2020 Feb 26;13(1):32-36. PMID: 32133043; PMCID: PMC7043716.

Arnstein, P., Shade, M., Herr, K., Young, H. & Fishman, S. (2023). Supporting caregivers who manage older adults' chronic pain: Lower risk strategies. *American Journal of Nursing*, 123(2), 46-52. doi: 10.1097/01.NAJ.0000919740.00088.93.

Schofield et al (2022) Evidence-based clinical practice guidelines on the management of pain in older people—a summary report. *British J of Pain*, 16(1), 6-13, doi:10.1177/2049463720976155.

Westman KF, Blaisdell C. Many Benefits, Little Risk: The Use of Massage in Nursing Practice. *Am J Nurs*. 2016 Jan;116(1):34-9; quiz 40-1. doi: 10.1097/01.NAJ.0000476164.97929.f2. PMID: 26669844.