

## FAST FACTS: Massage as Nondrug Pain Treatment

**Massage** is provided by either using mechanical devices (e.g., 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: DO NOT**

- DO NOT: Use massage if it increases pain
- DO NOT: Massage areas being treated with radiation
  - Skin is more fragile
  - No lotions or powders on the area
  - If being treated for bone metastases, bones at higher risk for fracture or bone pain.
- DO NOT: Massage over open wounds
  - Possibility of infection
  - Risk of interruption healing
- DO NOT: Massage lower extremities without checking with healthcare team to ensure individual is not at risk.
- DO NOT: Massage an area with a blood clot, as these could become emboli (travels through the bloodstream, lodges in a blood vessel and blocks it).
- DO NOT: Massage areas with pressure ulcers because massage could cause further damage.

### ✓ **Massage application guidelines: DO**

- DO: Assess preference for touch before massaging
- DO: Massage for 5-20 minutes using light pressure and a steady stroke
- DO: Use lotion or essential oil unless this is something you cannot tolerate, as it helps reduce friction against skin and moisturizes at same time.
- DO: Schedule at specific time of day as gives something to look forward to.

✓ **Massage application guidelines: CAREFUL**

- Use caution in older adults prone to skin tears or pressure ulcers
- Use caution over bony body areas as this may be uncomfortable/painful

✓ **Necessary equipment**

- Requires no special equipment unless using a 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**

1. Using warm lotion or essential oil, gently move hands over painful area using a consistent motion. Lotions or essential oils. The use of warm lotion is particularly calming. Lotion can be warmed.
2. If using a personal massager, be sure to follow instructions accompanying device. Use light pressure to move the massager over affected area. Teach patients how to self-massage using device.

✓ **What else you should do**

- Ensure you are trained appropriately prior to implementing this Nondrug Treatment Technique, speak with professional or your healthcare team to determine correct technique or where to find prior training if you need additional training.
- Seek assistance as needed with implementing this Nondrug Treatment Technique from a friend, loved one, or licensed professional for massage.
- Document all Nondrug Treatment Techniques on your [Pain Diary](#) and log pain information before and after use of Nondrug Treatment.

**Adapted from:**

Beth Miller-Kraybill, Nondrug Pain & Symptom Management in Nursing Assistant EndofLife: Computerized Educational Program.

The Nursing Home Pain Management Algorithm Clinical Trial, R01 NR009100, 7/1/05 – 4/30/10; Mary Ersek (PI).