

The Importance of Self-Care for Massage Therapists

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Massage school can be an exciting time, with many techniques and approaches to learn. The skills you learn in your training will enable you to help clients maintain their health and well-being. But what about your health and well-being? Have you thought about what it will take to deal with the physical and emotional demands of your new career as a massage therapist?

Massage is a rewarding profession that places considerable demands on the therapist. As a result, 77 percent of massage therapists experience symptoms or injury during their careers.¹ With such a high rate of injury in the profession, learning effective self-care and injury-prevention techniques is one of the most important things you can do to have a successful career. Proven methods exist that have been shown in decades of research to prevent work-related musculoskeletal disorders.

While you're still in training is the best time to start learning these methods. If you start integrating self-care and injury-prevention techniques into your life now, while you are still a student, taking care of yourself will become second nature. It's much easier—and less disruptive to your career—to prevent injury from happening in the first place than to deal with an injury once it has occurred.

When an injury happens in a massage career, it's nearly always the result of certain factors. A successful prevention strategy will need to address all of these factors. For this reason, using just one strategy—such as good body mechanics or conditioning exercises—is usually not enough by itself to keep you from getting injured. In combination, however, a variety of tactics can be very effective.



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Here are six steps you'll need to take to stay healthy in your career as a massage therapist:

1. Maintain awareness of the risk of injury in your work. Reading this article is a good start. It's important to acknowledge risk exists, so you can learn how to best protect yourself.

2. Understand how risk factors can cause injury. You may have personal risk factors like a previous injury, for example, that can increase your injury risk. Massage work carries a number of risk factors, including repetitive movement, awkward postures and hand force. Particularly in combination, these risk factors can lead to injury.

3. Reduce risk factors through ergonomics. Because the work of a massage therapist is so physically demanding, workplace risk factors are often the primary cause of musculoskeletal disorders. While you can't do anything about some risk factors, such as your age or a previous injury, you can usually modify your working conditions or workplace setup to reduce work-related risk factors. The science of ergonomics concentrates on fitting the work to the worker using proven methods that can be remarkably effective in reducing injury risk.

4. Develop good body mechanics and work practices. Once you have used the principles of ergonomics to optimize your workspace and work life, you need to reinforce those principles by using your body properly in that workspace. Good ergonomics and good body mechanics go hand in hand.

For example, if you don't have enough room around your table, you won't be able to use good body mechanics. Once your workspace is set up properly, it's essential to use good body mechanics at your table so that you get the full injury-prevention benefit of having your workspace set up properly.

5. Take care of your general physical and emotional health. You need to be in good general health to be able to withstand the physical demands of your work. Getting enough sleep and exercise, eating well and not smoking are among the healthy practices that can help your body heal quickly after a long day at work. You'll also need to do a combination of exercises and stretches designed to keep you in shape for the rigors of your work. Avoid burnout and seek help for depression and anxiety, as these are also risk factors for injury.



Read this article in its entirety at
www.futureLMT.com/selfcare.

Lauriann Greene, C.E.A.S., and Richard W. Goggins, C.P.E., L.M.P., are co-authors of *Save Your Hands! The Complete Guide to Injury Prevention and Ergonomics for Manual Therapists 2nd Edition*, the leading self-care textbook used in schools across North America. Greene and Goggins offer continuing education courses, a Certified Injury Prevention Instructor (CIPI) program, as well as consulting and training to help manual therapists and their employers prevent workplace injury. For more information, visit www.SaveYourHands.com.