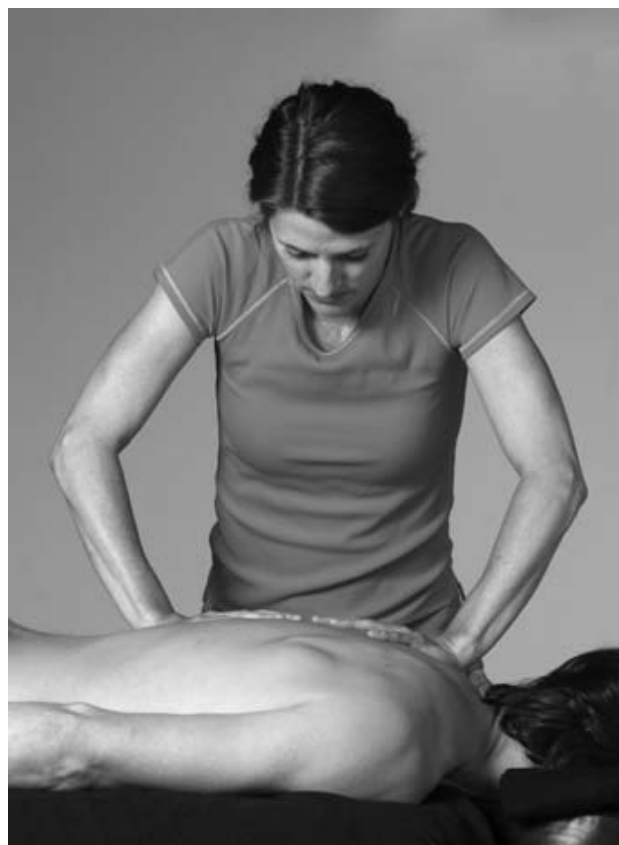


FOR EFFECTIVE INJURY PREVENTION, THINK HOLISTICALLY

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Massage is a physically demanding profession. Massage practitioners often use repetitive movements, hand force, static loading and awkward postures in their work, all recognized risk factors for developing musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). The therapist's age, general health, previous injuries and other personal physical and emotional factors are additional risk factors. It is not surprising to learn that a 2006 study of massage therapists and bodyworkers showed that 77 percent had experienced pain or other musculoskeletal symptoms related to their massage work, and 41 percent were diagnosed with an MSD[1]. While in Australia, a recent survey among massage therapists found that there is a high number reported pain in the wrist and thumb (69%), neck (59%), shoulder (54%) and lower back (26%). The most troublesome is in wrist and pain with 42% indicating daily to weekly pain and affecting their work[2].

Before you start thinking about putting your treatment table up for sale, it's important to understand that injury is NOT inevitable. Many professions have inherent risks, and many people in these professions have successful, long-term, healthy careers. There is a great deal you can do to prevent injuries from occurring in the first place, and to minimize their effects if they do occur. The key to managing your risk of injury is to reduce your exposure to risk factors as much as possible. Taking the necessary steps to prevent injury is much easier and less disruptive to your career than dealing with an injury once it has occurred.



Fatigue may lead to poor postures, such as "wearing your shoulders as earrings."

Developing Your Multifaceted, Holistic Injury Prevention Strategy

Decades of research have shown that the most effective strategy for preventing MSDs is a holistic and multifaceted one, including five primary steps:

1. Maintaining awareness of the risk of injury in your

Save your hands

work

2. Understanding how risk factors cause injury
3. Reducing risk factors through ergonomics
4. Developing good body mechanics and work practices
5. Taking care of your general physical and emotional health, including physical conditioning.

Using the principles of ergonomics, you need to design your massage space to fit your body and the type of work you do. You can't use good mechanics in a poorly-designed workspace. You'll need enough space to move freely around your table to avoid static positioning and awkward postures. Your table needs to be adjustable so you can work comfortably and efficiently as you change techniques and clients (a power-adjustable table is ideal). Raise equipment to waist level so you can avoid bending to reach them or having to lift them in awkward postures. Design your work schedule so you have a consistent, manageable workload from day to day and week to week, to avoid any sudden increases in workload that could lead to injury.

Strive to develop "good" body mechanics, not "perfect" body mechanics. The idea is to continue to use your body in a natural and efficient way, while maintaining an approach that maximizes your strength and avoids overloading the most vulnerable parts of your body. Modify or eliminate any technique that causes you pain or discomfort; if it hurts, don't do it.

Take care of your general health. Maintaining good physical conditioning, getting enough sleep, eating well and avoiding unhealthy habits like smoking can have a direct effect on your ability to heal tissue damage before it progresses to the point of injury.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts to avoid injury, you may find yourself developing symptoms. Recognizing symptoms and getting early, appropriate treatment is the best way to minimize interruption to your work and get you back on the road to health as quickly as possible.

Learning to give your own physical and emotional needs the same care and consideration that you give to your clients is critical to preventing injury. Be good to yourself, and a long, healthy career will be within your grasp.

Reference

[1] Lauriann Greene and Richard W. Goggins, "Musculoskeletal Symptoms and Injuries among Experienced Massage and Bodywork Professionals," *Massage & Bodywork*, 2006; Dec-Jan: 48-58.

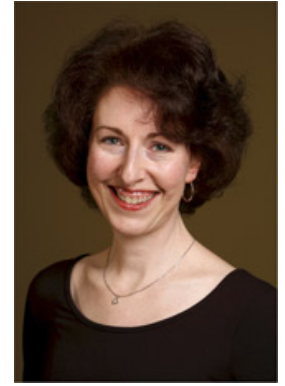
[2] Terra Rosa. Survey of musculoskeletal injuries among massage therapists in Australia. January 2008, Available from <http://www.terrarosa.com.au/articles/survey.pdf>

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Lauriann Greene, CEAS and Richard W. Goggins, CPE, LMP are co-authors of Save Your Hands! The Complete Guide to Injury Prevention and Ergonomics for Manual Therapists, 2nd Ed., the leading textbook on self-care worldwide since 1995. Save Your Hands! offers consulting and training services to help massage therapists prevent workplace injury, affordable continuing education courses, and the Certified Injury Prevention Instructor program. Read also 6 questions to Lauriann on page 43.

6 Questions to Lauriann Greene



1. When and how did you decide to become a bodyworker?

I had problems with back pain for quite a while, and I found that massage was the most helpful treatment for me. When I decided to change careers in 1992 (I had worked in the music industry for years), I felt I wanted to help people through massage as I had been helped by several very talented therapists for my back pain. I went through an 1100 hour program at Seattle Massage School to become a Licensed Massage Practitioner (LMP).

2. What do you find most exciting about bodywork therapy?

I'm continuously amazed by the power of touch. An experienced, skilled massage therapist or bodyworker can have a profound effect on the client's physical and emotional health. It's wonderful how massage combines science and art, intellect and intuition, knowledge and creativity. There are so many different ways to treat any one condition, it's truly up to the experience, skill and creativity of the therapist to find the treatment that works for the client and is also comfortable for that therapist to deliver..

3. What is your favourite bodywork book?

Besides our own book, *Save Your Hands!* 2nd Edition ☺ I'd have to say *Trail Guide to the Body* by Andrew Biel, and not just because I was the Associate Editor for the book. Palpation is so important for manual therapists, and *Trail Guide* is THE essential guide to learning palpation.

4. What is the most challenging part of your work?

Getting therapists to understand how essential it is for them to actively implement a multifaceted injury prevention strategy in their work. It's so much easier to prevent injury than it is to treat it once it happens, and

yet many therapists don't get interested in self-care and injury prevention until they're already having symptoms. Ideally, all therapists would learn effective injury prevention at school, so they learn good habits from the beginning. Schools tend to teach body mechanics, but body mechanics by itself has not been shown to prevent injury. There are many factors that contribute to causing injury, so it takes a combination of different tactics to keep the therapist healthy.

5. What advice you can give to fresh massage therapists who wish to make a career out of it?

Take care of yourselves! One of the principal reasons therapists leave the profession is injury or ongoing symptoms. The rate of injury among massage therapists and bodyworkers is very high. Proven methods exist to prevent injury, and it's possible to heal and get back to work quickly if you recognize the first symptoms and treat them early and effectively. You need to find a balance between client care and self-care. You can't help others if you hurt yourself - you deserve as much consideration as your clients do.

6. How do you see the future of bodywork & massage therapy?

I think we're just starting to understand how important massage and bodywork are to health and well-being. I think we'll see these therapies become an essential, basic part of preventive medicine in the years to come. I'm involved in efforts to raise teaching standards in the profession, and I think we'll see massage and bodywork instructors who are more highly trained and therefore even more effective. I'm also doing all I can to make sure that self-care, injury prevention and ergonomics are taught at every school by instructors who have been trained to teach evidence-based information in this very important subject.