

Becoming a *Professional Massage Therapist*

The profession of massage therapy is growing rapidly. Consumer demand is greater than ever, the number of spas is quickly rising, and the medical profession is increasingly recognizing the role massage plays in integrated healthcare.

Massage Therapy Growing as a Career Opportunity

Recent research reflects growing trends in massage therapy: people are getting more massages, and its value is acknowledged by most Americans. It appeals to every age group. People are seeking the therapeutic benefits of massage for relaxation, to relieve aches and pains, to help reduce stress and to improve their general health and well-being.

The 2004 Massage Therapy Consumer Survey¹ commissioned by the American Massage Therapy Association® (AMTA®) showed that more than one in five adults surveyed (21 percent) received a massage in the past 12 months. This represents a 13-point jump since 1997. When respondents were asked whether they have had a massage in the past five years, the percentage increased to 32 percent.

The number of massage therapy training programs is also on the rise. In 2002, there were an estimated 628 massage therapy schools that offered programs of a minimum of 500 in-class hours. In 2004, the number of schools offering 500 in-class-hour programs was 1,135, more than an 80 percent increase in two years.

The Ancient Tradition of Massage

Massage comes from both Western and Eastern traditions. The first written records referring to massage date back more than 4,000 years to China. Eastern traditions also can be traced back to the Ayurvedic medicine of India. Shiatsu, acupressure, reflexology and many other contemporary massage and bodywork modalities have their roots in these sources.

Western traditions date back to ancient Greece and Rome. Modern Western massage owes a great deal to the work of Per Henrik Ling, a 19th-century educator and athlete from Sweden. His approach, which combined hands-on techniques with active movements, became known as Swedish massage, and now is perhaps the most common therapeutic massage modality in the West.

The State of the Massage Therapy Profession

The public perception of massage has changed dramatically with the increase of well-trained, state-regulated and nationally certified massage therapy professionals. Public demand is driving the trend as the benefits of therapeutic massage are validated through evidence-based research.

As public acceptance of massage has grown in the United States, the number of massage therapists has risen dramatically. AMTA estimates that the number of massage therapists in the United States, including students, is between 260,000 and 290,000.

Another indication of the growing acceptance of massage therapy is in regulation of practitioners. As of January 2005, 33 states and the District of Columbia regulate massage therapists. All but one of these regulatory agencies require a minimum of 500 hours of classroom training in massage and related subjects, and the trend in massage therapy education is toward increased hours of training. Eight states require 600 to 1,000 hours of study.

The provinces in Canada which regulate the profession require a minimum of 2,200 to 3,000 hours of training, with some training programs lasting 2-3 years.



American Massage Therapy Association®

500 Davis Street, Suite 900 Evanston, IL 60201-4695 phone (877) 905-2700 fax (847) 864-1178 www.amtamassage.org

Trends in Massage

Several trends in massage suggest that the opportunities for massage therapy careers are increasing, as indicated in several surveys.

Massage for Pain Management. Ninety percent of respondents to the 2004 AMTA Consumer Survey agreed that massage can be effective in reducing pain. Nearly half (49 percent) of those polled have had a massage at some time to relieve pain. As a preferred method for relieving pain, massage ranked second, after medication. Third and fourth choices were chiropractic and physical therapy, respectively.

Acceptance by Healthcare Providers. One in five of Americans polled (20 percent) say they have discussed massage therapy with their doctor or healthcare provider, up from 14 percent in 2002. For those who discussed massage therapy with their healthcare providers, 62 percent of the providers strongly recommended or encouraged their patients to get a massage. Of those who indicated that a healthcare professional had recommended massage therapy, 61 percent indicated it was a physician, 45 percent said a physical therapist had recommended massage, and 42 percent said a chiropractor had recommended it.

Americans Growing Older. The movement of the Baby Boom generation into retirement and beyond may have an enormous impact on the massage therapy profession.² The 2004 AMTA Consumer Survey showed 21% of those ages 55-64 had a massage in the last 12 months, compared to only 13% in 2002. Americans also are living much longer than in the past, increasing the length of time someone might be a massage therapy client.

Growth in Spas. With an estimated 12,000 spas doing business in the United States, and more growth anticipated, the demand for massage therapists at these facilities is on the rise.³

Variations on Massage Therapy Careers

There is no such thing as “a standard massage therapy practice.” One of the reasons individuals choose this profession is because of the flexibility it offers in terms of work hours, independence, and choice of practice locations and types.

Income levels for massage therapists vary by region of the country, experience and type of practice.

Massage therapists choose whether to work full time or part time. According to a 2000 AMTA survey of members, 41 percent reported that they work full time (more than 17 paid one-hour massage sessions per week) and 59% said part time (fewer than 17 one-hour sessions per week).⁴ They also choose whether to work for themselves, as an independent contractor (which is a form of working for themselves), or as an employee.

Settings in Which Massage Therapists Practice

Some examples of locations in which massage therapists practice are:

- massage office
- group practice
- office in home
- physicians' offices and clinics
- hospitals and wellness centers
- nursing homes/hospices
- chiropractic offices
- on-site (chair massage in offices, airports, at public events, etc.)
- health clubs and fitness centers
- sports teams and events (amateur and professional)
- hotels
- spas and resorts
- hotels
- beauty and hair salons
- cruise ships

People receive massage in a variety of locations. The 2004 AMTA Consumer Survey reported that 21 percent of respondents received their last massage at a spa and 17 percent at the massage therapist's location, while the third most common location was at home or in the home of someone they know (11 percent). Eight percent received their last massage in a chiropractor's office, 8 percent hotel/resort/cruise and 5 percent a beauty salon.

A 2004 AMTA research survey⁵ showed that its members work in these practice settings:

Own office	34%
Own home	36%
Client's home	43%
Chiropractic/MD or Hospital	25%
Shared office w/ other massage therapists	20%
Day spa/Beauty salon	20%
Health/Athletic club	7%

Sports/Rehabilitative Massage. Many professional athletes rely on massage to help them increase stamina and range of motion, and to recover from injuries and muscle soreness. One example of massage therapists working with athletes is their participation at the Olympic Games. More than 200 U.S.-based massage therapists volunteered at the 2000 Atlanta Olympics, 60 at the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City and more than 100 at the 2004 Summer Games in Athens. The U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) Sports Medicine Division volunteer program initially included only athletic trainers, physicians and chiropractors, but expanded in 2002 to include massage therapists.⁶ Employers of rehabilitative massage therapists include sports medicine clinics, university and professional athlete teams and fitness centers.

Massage and Medicine. Physicians increasingly recognize massage as a beneficial healthcare therapy. Of the physicians whose patients discussed massage therapy with them, 62 percent strongly recommended or encouraged massage.⁷ As of 2004, 25 percent of AMTA members performed massage therapy in a healthcare setting such as a hospital, doctor's

office, or chiropractic clinic. According to the American Hospital Association's (AHA) 2003 survey on the use of complementary and alternative medicine therapies in hospitals, 22 percent of the hospitals surveyed incorporate massage into hospital care. The most frequent reason for receiving massage in a hospital setting is stress (75 percent), followed closely by pain management (70 percent).⁸

Spas. The spa industry is one of the fastest growing segments of career opportunities for massage therapists. An estimated 12,100 spas throughout the United States employ approximately 281,000 people.⁹ Nearly all spas offer massage therapy as one of their menu of personal services. According to the 2004 State of the Industry Report published by the Spa Association (SPAA), massage services bring in more than one-third (36 percent) of all spa revenues.

Types of spas in which massage therapists work include destination spas, day spas, resort spas, and on cruise ships. Some cater to particular guests, such as teens, families, or women.

Generally, spas pay massage therapists less than they would make in other settings. However, some spas hire massage therapists as employees, offering extensive benefits, such as health insurance and 401(k)s. In spas, massage therapists may also be required to perform other work related to the spa, such as selling products.

Modalities Practiced by Massage Therapists

The massage therapy profession includes practitioners of many modalities and specialties. The four basic modalities are Swedish, trigger point/neuromuscular, deep tissue and sports massage.

Many massage therapists develop areas of specialty after their entry level training. Specialties might include relaxation therapy, on-site massage, spa-oriented massage, or sports massage. Others receive additional training in other massage modalities or in bodywork therapies, such as shiatsu, myofascial release, acupressure or reflexology. Massage therapists might also specialize in a particular type of

client, such as pregnant mothers, infants, athletes, spa goers, or stressed employees. Some massage therapists specialize in animal massage, particularly for dogs and horses (known as equine massage).

Broad training allows massage therapists to decide what modalities they will later use in their practice. If a massage therapist knows in advance which modality or type of client he or she wants to work with, he or she should discuss this preference with the school's education direction to be sure that training will provide appropriate preparation for such a career.

Who Chooses Massage as a Career?

There is no one "type" of person who becomes a massage therapist, but there are many commonalities among them. Two common denominators among individuals who choose massage therapy as a career choice are, 1) they desire to help others and 2) they enjoy the field of healthcare.¹⁰

Eighty percent of AMTA members are female, and 20 percent are male.¹¹ More than three-quarters (76 percent) are ages 25 to 54; the median age is 45.¹² Forty-four percent attended at least some college.¹³

The Path to a Career in Massage Therapy

Pursuing a career in massage therapy often involves three steps: 1) Complete a training program that will qualify you to practice in the location you choose; 2) Become nationally certified by passing the National Certification Exam for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork; 3) Meet the requirements of your state or municipality (such as obtaining a license or other credential, if you practice in an area where massage therapy is regulated).

To find a school or program near you, see a listing of AMTA Council of Schools members, at www.amtamassage.org/amta-cos/. Membership in AMTA Council of Schools indicates that the school or program meets the regulatory requirements of its jurisdiction and that it has a minimum 500-hour program.

Accreditation of Schools and Programs

Accreditation of a school or program ensures that it provides the quality of training deemed necessary by educators, massage therapists and some regulatory authorities to practice as a trained professional. Several accrediting bodies offer voluntary accreditation of massage programs and/or schools.

AMTA views the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA) as the premier accrediting body for massage therapy training. COMTA's standards of accreditation are established by a broad base of stakeholders, including educators, massage therapists, administrators, employers, and the public. COMTA is approved as an accrediting agency by the U.S. Department of Education, which means COMTA schools are authorized to provide Title IV financial aid to students.

COMTA accredited programs meet a minimum 600-hour requirement. The curriculum standards are based on competencies; that is, the student must be able to demonstrate a mastery of the subject through performance, not merely test results. Six competencies are required, as follows: 1) planning an effective massage, 2) performing an effective massage, 3) self-care strategies, 4) ethical, therapeutic relationship with clients, 5) successful business practice strategy, and 6) professional development.

For more information about COMTA accreditation and the status of particular schools, visit www.comta.org. To see a complete listing of the competencies required to ensure the quality of education accredited by COMTA, look at its Policies and Standards section, posted to the Web site.

Other organizations also offer accreditation of massage schools.

National Certification

Certification by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) is an indication that a massage therapist has attained a particular professional credential. National certification is an assurance

for consumers that a massage therapist has the knowledge and ability to perform competently and safely. It also strengthens the credibility of the profession. Regulatory bodies in 29 states (as of 2004) require national certification as a minimal requirement before a massage therapist is allowed to practice.

The certification process incorporates testing in competency, ethics and practice standards. It also requires periodic evidence that the massage therapist participates in continuing education to keep current and remain competent in the field. Most students take the National Certification Exam upon completion of massage school training.

For more information about NCBTMB, visit www.ncbtmb.com.

Tips for Choosing the Right Massage Training Program

1. Learn about the profession of massage therapy, such as the different modalities of therapy and the requirements for the jurisdiction where you want to practice.
2. Have a massage from several massage therapists and ask their opinions of massage schools and programs.
3. Look at several programs before you select one. Attend an open house, interview graduates, read catalogs, audit a class, and call the Better Business Bureau or your state's vocational school office.
4. Consider the type of massage therapy practice you prefer. Some programs focus on relaxation massage therapies, while others target rehabilitative massage or massage in a medical setting. Keep in mind that your preferences for your future practice may change while you are in massage school.
5. Review the curriculum to make sure that it covers what you want to learn, and that the program includes the minimum requirements for you to practice in the area you desire to practice.

6. Ask how the program supports you in setting up a practice. (e.g. how many hours of training will you get in business development and writing a business plan?)
7. Be aware of the time requirements for a particular program. Make sure your personal obligations will allow enough time to study and practice outside of class.
8. Examine the credentials and experience of the faculty.
9. Determine whether the educational philosophy of the program and faculty agree with your own views about health, healing and the purpose and use of massage therapy. You might make an appointment for a massage with a faculty member, a graduate, or a student at the school's clinic to learn their approach to massage.
10. Request information about student services, such as postgraduate job placement, tutoring, continuing education and financial aid.
11. Understand the complete costs of training: tuition, fees and other costs such as the purchase of a massage table, books and supplies.

Massage Laws and Regulations

Thirty-three states currently regulate massage and several others are moving toward statewide regulation or licensing. Most states' regulations include the minimum hours of training required, what proof is needed to demonstrate competency (for instance, completion of the National Certification Exam), and how many hours of continuing education are required to maintain a license or regulatory requirement. State regulations also include whether the practice of massage is "reciprocal" – that is, if the state will allow a massage therapist to practice who is licensed in another state. To find the most recent list of states and their regulation of massage therapy, go to www.amtamassage.org/about/state_boards.html. Local laws and ordinances also may apply, even in states with statewide licensure.

States that Administer Massage Practice Laws

The following list is current as of January 2005. To find the most recent list of states regulating massage therapy and their regulations, go to www.amtamassage.org/about/state_boards.html.

Alabama
Arizona
Arkansas
Connecticut
Delaware
Washington, D.C.
Florida
Hawaii
Illinois
Iowa
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Mississippi
Missouri
Nebraska
New Hampshire
New Mexico
New York
North Carolina
North Dakota
Ohio
Oregon
Rhode Island
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Virginia
Washington
West Virginia
Wisconsin

The Importance of Joining a Professional Association

Membership in a professional association is an important step in your career as a massage therapist. A good association provides you with professional insurance, professional recognition, member networking, practice-building tools, continuing education, and the opportunity to shape the future of the profession.

The American Massage Therapy Association is a non-profit, professional association, created in 1943 by massage therapists, for massage therapists. It has advanced the art, science and practice of massage therapy by establishing a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. AMTA established an independent commission to accredit massage therapy schools (COMTA) in 1989, and led the way in establishing an independent massage therapist certification board (NCBTMB) in 1992. It created the Massage Therapy Foundation (www.massagetherapyfoundation.org), a non-profit organization whose purpose is to advance the knowledge and practice of massage therapy by supporting scientific research, education and community service.

In addition to funding legislative efforts that create a supportive climate for the practice of massage, AMTA is also active in working with influential healthcare organizations to further the acceptance and credibility of massage therapy and working cooperatively with other massage and bodywork groups (e.g. spa organizations, the Trager Association, Rolf Institute). AMTA works with the Integrated Healthcare Policy Consortium (IHPC) to advance public policy in the integrated healthcare arena. AMTA also works with the American Medical Association and has a representative on its Health Care Professional Advisory Committee, which addresses issues concerning CPT (Current Procedural Terminology) codes (the codes used when submitting insurance claims).

Through AMTA's National Massage Awareness Week[®], the last full week of

October, AMTA actively promotes massage therapy and the profession to the public. AMTA's Web site provides access to information about massage and the association. A special Members' Section gives members quick and easy access to their association to get answers to questions, update their address, communicate their ideas, and gather information to help them in their career.

AMTA members are members of the national association and automatically are part of their state chapter (or Washington, D.C.), where they can become directly involved in grassroots support of the profession. AMTA is a member-oriented association, with members actively charting the direction of their association and the profession.

Check out the public access sections of AMTA's Web site at www.amtamassage.org and read AMTA's Mission and Core Ideology at www.amtamassage.org/about/CoreIdeology.html.

AMTA Code of Ethics for Massage Therapists

Massage therapists shall:

Demonstrate commitment to provide the highest quality massage therapy/bodywork to those who seek their professional advice.

Acknowledge the inherent worth and individuality of each person by not discriminating or behaving in any prejudicial manner with clients and/or colleagues.

Demonstrate professional excellence through regular self-assessment of strengths, limitations, and effectiveness by continued education and training.

Acknowledge the confidential nature of the professional relationship with clients and respect each client's right to privacy.

Conduct all business and professional activities within their scope of practice, the law of the land, and project a professional image.

AMTA Membership

AMTA has two types of membership to meet the needs of massage therapists: 1) Student and 2) Professional. Membership includes membership in your AMTA Chapter, member discounts on such things as music, supplies, publications, and massage equipment, an online job search capability, and subscriptions to the *Hands On*[®] newsletter, *e-touch*SM email newsletter and *MASSAGE THERAPY JOURNAL*[®]. Active membership in AMTA also includes \$6 million annual aggregate occurrence insurance coverage under a Professional and General Liability Policy, with \$2 million per occurrence.

One of the most valuable benefits of AMTA Professional Active Membership is voluntary inclusion in *AMTA's Find a Massage Therapist*[®] national locator service, which connects potential clients and medical professionals to Professional members. This online and toll-free service is used by more than 200,000 callers and Internet users annually.

To Become an AMTA Member

Go to www.amtamassage.org, and click on *Student* or *Massage Therapist* to learn about the benefits of each type of membership.

Or contact:

American Massage Therapy Association
Member Information
500 Davis Street, Suite 900
Evanston, Illinois 60201-4695
Phone: Toll free (877) 905-2700
Fax: (847) 864-1178

¹ 2004 Massage Therapy Consumer Fact Sheet, the findings of a telephone survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International, Princeton, NJ, and commissioned by AMTA. The survey was conducted August 5-8, 2004, among a national probability sample of 1,009 adults (507 men and 502 women), ages 18 and older, living in private households in the continental United States. The survey has a confidence level of plus or minus 3 percent. This is the eighth annual survey of American consumers commissioned by AMTA.

² AMTA Research Summary 2004, “The Challenge to Deliver Value with Meaning”

³ 2004 Spa Industry Study conducted by the International Spa Association (ISPA)

⁴ 2000 Survey of AMTA Members

⁵ AMTA Research Summary 2004, “The Challenge to Deliver Value with Meaning”

⁶ “An Olympic Moment,” by Bob McAtee with JoAnn Milivojevic, in *Massage Therapy Journal*, Fall 2004, pp. 46-57.

⁷ AMTA’s 2004 Massage Therapy Consumer Fact Sheet

⁸ American Hospital Association Survey 2003

⁹ *2004 Spa Industry Study*, conducted and prepared by PriceWaterhouseCoopers for the International Spa Association (ISPA)

¹⁰ A 1997 Survey of AMTA Members showed 92 percent chose a career in massage therapy

to help others, and 87 percent said because they enjoy the field of healthcare.

¹¹ 2000 Survey of AMTA Members

¹² AMTA Research Summary 2004, “The Challenge to Deliver Value with Meaning”

¹³ AMTA Research Summary 2004, “The Challenge to Deliver Value with Meaning”