

What's this "Walton Scale" the massage therapists always mention in their charting?

The Walton Scale was developed by Tracy Walton, a Massachusetts-based oncology massage therapist, educator and author (in collaboration with two other leaders in the field, Gayle MacDonald and Dawn Nelson) who realized that it was not enough, when working with medically compromised clients, to say "I work 'lightly'" or "I use 'less' pressure than I do with my healthy clients."

One of the most prominent characteristics of oncology massage and hospital massage therapy is that it is safely and properly adapted to the unique needs of individual patients. There is an adjustment to the amount of pressure a massage therapist uses while applying a stroke or compression. This pressure is applied by humans and the human experience is subjective. Each massage therapist comes from his or her own frame of reference, as does each patient or client. If a massage therapist who usually does vigorous, deep tissue or sports massage tells me that he/she worked "lightly", that will be much different than if a massage therapist who usually provides Polarity or CranioSacral Therapy tells me that he/she worked "lightly".

The Walton Scale uses specific characteristics of contact that are both palpable and observable with the eye to standardize 5 different "levels" of pressure. This way massage therapists and other healthcare professionals can share a common language about how much pressure is appropriate for a given patient. On the other side of this flier you will see a description of levels 1-3. These are the most commonly used pressures in the hospital/oncology setting/community as we are working with people who are compromised, sometimes even years after treatment and in ways of which they may not even be aware. The Walton Scale allows us to talk about our work with **all** types of individuals and to keep our treatment and documentation appropriate and understandable to whatever our patient needs and to what the other members of his/her healthcare team will find relevant.

The Walton Pressure Scale:

Which massage therapy pressure is right for which patient? What's the difference?

Pressure Level	Tissues Displaced	MT body use	Common Uses
1	Slight skin movement only	Little or no hand strength; no leaning with any weight of body; weight of arms/hands only	This is the maximum pressure for patients who are severely medically frail, have known blood clots or highly unstable tissues (bones, skin), patients who are unresponsive and patients who are in immediate surgical recovery; this is the amount of pressure you might use if you were applying lotion to an elderly person for everyday moisturizing purposes
2	Slight movement of superficial adipose tissue and muscle	Same as Level 1	This is the maximum pressure for most hospital patients; patients who are at risk for clotting, are taking anticoagulants or who are stable, but still medically compromised; this is the amount of pressure you might use applying lotion to yourself or sunscreen to a small child
3	Some movement of medium layers of adipose tissue, muscle and blood vessels	Upper body and upper extremity strength will begin to be introduced, but no use of body weight or leaning body mechanics	In the hospital setting, we typically use this pressure level with patients whose vitals are stable, who are afebrile, ambulatory and communicative; this is a more "everyday" pressure that resembles a soothing Swedish massage you might receive at a spa

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