

Article 5: How to do "Painless Deep Tissue Massage"

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Pre-requisites for this section:

- 1) A thorough knowledge of the muscles and their "Origin", "Insertion", and "Action".
- 2) A willingness to try working with my definition of pain (see "Article 1 - Pain").
- 3) A commitment to communicating with your clients to minimize any pain you add.
- 4) A moderate understanding of Trigger Points (and usually having one of the Davies & Davies books as a well-used reference).¹

Basic Rules of "Painless Deep Tissue Massage":

- 1) Try strongly to avoid adding pain.
- 2) Communicate clearly with your client
- 3) Actively encourage your client to clearly communicate with you.
- 4) Most people tend to under-report their discomfort. Watch for non-verbal cues and ask them very clear questions - is this uncomfortable, etc.
- 5) ANY indication that they are approaching pain should cause you to IMMEDIATELY reduce speed and/or pressure.

Massage Process

Generally, I begin the massage with the client face-down. This allows me to start in one of the most troublesome areas - the back and neck.

Sometimes, after a particularly intense session, a client will feel as though they had a good workout for the next day or two. At no point should there be additional pain.

Occasionally, especially after the first session, clients feel so good that they are tempted to go out and do more than their body is ready to do. Please do NOT do this. It takes several days and perhaps a few more sessions for their body to complete the repairs to their muscles the massage has helped start.

Special concerns for Clients with:

Chronic Pain, Fibromyalgia, or Chronic Fatigue

During the first few sessions, be vigilant about adding pain. Some people with fibromyalgia simply CANNOT tolerate much pressure. And they frequently are not capable of giving good feedback about their discomfort.

It is true that to help improve the function and reduce pain in their bodies, you will EVENTUALLY have to reach deeper levels.

Nevertheless, a light, painless massage is MUCH more useful than a painful massage that puts them in a crisis or causes enough pain that they do not return. Eventually they will be able to tolerate more and more pressure. Based on the research that

¹ Davies, C. and Davies, A., 2013, "The Trigger Point Therapy Workbook", Third Edition, Oakland, CA, New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

stated that "fibromyalgia patients show abnormal increase in neurotransmitters that signal pain"², I was initially concerned that it would not be possible for massage to help. Fortunately, by avoiding the addition of pain, in every case, it has been possible to return the body's sensitivity to a normal level, sometimes taking as long as 6-10 sessions, but it is important to remain patient with your client and avoid working too hard too soon.

Back Pain, Sciatica, Carpal Tunnel

These pains are traditionally attributed to various nerve dysfunctions. There is a problem with this idea - in the USA, 70% of carpal tunnel surgeries fail (and I suspect that many of the 30% which succeed are due to good physical therapy). For many of these, I have seen dramatic improvements resulting from ONLY "Painless Deep Tissue Massage". What appears as a nerve problem or a subluxation of a vertebrae is frequently caused by over-tight muscles pressing on the nerve or the joint. Sciatica is often caused by trigger points in the muscles in the lower back and/or gluteal muscles. (The Davies & Davies books have a great deal of information on this.) Another useful book is "Treat your own Back", Robin McKenzie.³ This is very useful, but he neglects to encourage patients to work to increase the strength of their core and back. Some simple yoga exercises to help with this are shown in "Article 2 - Trigger Points" of this series.

Chronic Headaches

There are many articles about this, and it is an area where self-massage can have a dramatic effect. More is written in the Davies & Davies books. Here are some examples of online information.⁴

NEXT - Article 6: Goals of massage

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² <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/fibromyalgia/basics/causes/con-20019243>

Clauw DJ, Arnold LM, McCarberg BH (September 2011). "[The science of fibromyalgia](#)" *Mayo Clin Proc* **86** (9): 907–11. [doi:10.4065/mcp.2011.0206](https://doi.org/10.4065/mcp.2011.0206)

³ McKenzie, Robin, 2011, "Treat Your Own Back", Ninth Edition, Spinal Publications New Zealand Ltd.
McKenzie, Robin, 2011, "Soignez votre dos vous-même", Ninth Edition, Spinal Publications New Zealand Ltd.

⁴ <https://www.painscience.com/articles/spot-01-suboccipitals.php>
<https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/features/massage-therapy-stress-relief-much-more#1>