

fingertips for the client

BY LAURIE CHANCE SMITH



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MASSAGE ETIQUETTE

Massage therapy is a partnership—a relationship that feels intrinsically personal. In this joint venture, there's a mutual energy exchange that requires professionalism and respect by both parties. What should you expect from your massage therapist and what is expected of you? Here are a few answers.

WHAT IF I'M LATE?

For you and your therapist, rules of common courtesy apply. The appointment should start, and end, on time. Arrive for your session a few minutes early, especially if you prefer to splash water on your face or sponge off tired feet. Promptness guarantees you'll receive your full appointment. If a traffic snare causes you to arrive late, expect the session to still end at the appointed time. Other clients are likely scheduled after you. If you must cancel an appointment, call 24 hours in advance. Check with your therapist about fees incurred for missed or cancelled appointments.

WHAT TIME OF DAY IS BEST?

Some massage aficionados clamor for morning appointments that energize. Others discover an evening massage dissolves the day's stress. Massage can be a stimulating beginning, a midday respite, or a relaxing end to your day. Avoid massage after a heavy meal, and skip alcoholic beverages before, during, and after massage.

WHAT SHOULD I DO DURING THE MASSAGE?

Breathe. Therapists pace their strokes alongside your breath or breathe with you. "Massage helps clear the cobwebs in your head," says licensed massage therapist (LMT) Kathleen

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McCarty from Fort Worth, Texas. "You're able to stop circular thinking and enjoy the peace of massage."

If your therapist is performing deep-tissue work on a tight muscle, inhale deeply and exhale an audible sigh. Stay in the moment. Make massage a meditation.

SHOULD I TALK?

"It helps if clients are interactive at the beginning of the session, so I can learn their goals," says Lisa Seward, an LMT in Golden, Colorado. "Then, my goal is to help them relax and let go." Freely

voice your needs—on room temperature or the pressure exerted on that tender shoulder. But also get comfortable with silence. Stillness multiplies the restorative benefits of massage.

SHOULD I TIP?

"I don't count on tips as part of my income," Seward says. "I'm grateful they're getting the bodywork. A tip is a gift, and it's appreciated. It's not a requirement." If you feel you've received excellent service and you'd like to tip, 15–20 percent is a good guideline.

WHAT IF I LAUGH OR CRY?

Exhilaration, exhaustion, giddiness, and tears are all natural responses to massage. You may experience intensely creative thoughts; the solution to a long-unsolved problem may dawn. "Emotional outbursts are common," Seward says. "It's a high compliment, if I created the space for my client to let go."

HOW CAN I COMPLIMENT MY THERAPIST?

Fall asleep during massage, refer friends to your therapist, or tell your therapist the session passed too quickly. "It's rewarding when a client leaves the massage saying, 'When is your next open appointment?'" says Kimberly Reiter, an LMT in New Albany, Indiana.

Returning regularly for massage is the best compliment a client can give. **m&b**

6 *Laurie Chance Smith is a Texas-based writer and photographer who works for national and international markets on a plethora of topics. She can be reached at lauriechancesmith@yahoo.com.*