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Training

What causes goosebumps?
Can the body produce its own vitamins? Are bones alive? Did you know that skin replaces itself every two to four weeks? And that muscles make up half your body weight?

Training to be a massage therapist includes learning about the body—the structure of the body and how the body works. But learning about the human body is just the start.

What to expect

Training programs for massage therapists have something for everyone. They offer a balance between class time and practical time.

Class time

In class, instructors give lectures on the information that massage therapists need to know. Instructors also set up learning opportunities for the students. For example, students do research and work on group projects, watch training videos, and work on individual projects.

What do massage therapists learn about in class?

- bones, joints, muscles, tissue, and nerves
- how the systems of the body work, like the digestive system
- nutrition
- diseases
- different types of massage techniques
- remedial exercises and stretches
- **hydrotherapy**
- communicating with clients and health care professionals
- assessing and treating clients
- using work documents
- working in a safe and healthy way
- dealing with conflict on the job
- being professional
- setting up a business

Many instructors come to class with years of experience working in health care. Trainees have a chance to discuss ideas. They have a chance to ask questions about what they read in their textbooks.



Practical time

Practical time means hands-on time. Practical time gives students the chance to use what they learn in class. For example, in class, students learn about muscles in the body. During practical time, students give each other massages. They learn how each muscle feels and how to massage each muscle.

During practical time, instructors offer a safe and caring place for students to practise massage. Instructors observe students. They help students with their massage **technique**. They help students learn how to communicate with future clients.



Students practise massage on each other with the instructor's help.

How do instructors assess massage therapy students?

- Students show how to do massage techniques, and remedial stretches and exercises.
- They explain how each massage technique affects the body.
- They show that they can assess and describe a client's health and health history.
- They explain how to massage a client who has a medical issue.
- They treat clients and keep notes on how the client is doing under their care.
- They do practical exams.
- They write tests, mid-terms, and finals.



Students gain the confidence to give massages and need less and less support from the instructor.

Workplace practice

Some massage therapy schools give students a chance to practise giving massages in workplace settings. The workplace settings can be places like hospitals, spas, and clinics.

Sometimes students get practice by working at sports events.

Workplace practice gives students a chance to work in different workplace settings. It gives them a chance to see how businesses are set up and how they run. Workplace practice helps students decide where they might like to work when they finish their training.

Clinic practice

Some massage therapy schools have a clinic right in the school. People who want a massage make an appointment with the clinic. They pay for the massage, just like they do when they go to a spa.

Working in the school's clinic is a part of the massage therapy program. When students are ready, they start to work in the school's clinic. They have a chance to work on real clients. But the students still get help from their instructors.

Ask the instructor

Wendy has been teaching massage therapy for seven years. She used to be a nurse.

What helps students have success in their training?

Students have to be motivated and driven. It's not all about who's the smartest or who's the best book learner. It's a matter of how much effort you're going to put in. As long as you're committed and willing to do the work in the program, you'll be successful.



What kinds of reading and writing do students have to do?

There's a fair bit of reading in the textbook and handouts. Students have to take notes in class. They write records for the clients they massage—observations, treatment plans, how the client is improving.

What do students find challenging about training?

A lot of students have a hard time remembering the muscles and bones. You have to be on it every day, going over the names again and again. And students need a lot of time to build up to doing a massage. After the first full massage, they say, "Oh, my hands are so tired. I can't do this for a living." And they give up on themselves. They have to be committed and roll with it.

"It's not all about who's the smartest or who's the best book learner."