

SWEDISH MASSAGE



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Swedish massage – introduction

Swedish massage aims to relax the muscles by applying pressure on them against deeper muscles and bones, mostly rubbing in the same direction as the flow of blood that returns to the heart. The therapist uses his/her hands, arms and elbows to apply pressure. Swedish massage is the most widely spread type of massage in the Westerner world and it also known as classic massage.



Swedish massage – history and origins

Swedish massage was invented in the XIX century by Per Henrik Ling (1776-1839), a Swedish fencing master and gymnastics teacher, who founded the Royal Gymnastic Central Institute in Stockholm in 1813. This school was the first in the world to specialise in the training of gymnastics instructors.

The Dutch practitioner Johann Georg Mezger (1838-1909) gave the French names to the basic strokes used in Swedish massage.

Benefits of Swedish massage

Swedish massage has many physical and psychological benefits, including:

- Helping release toxins from the muscles
- Increase the oxygen flow in the blood
- Shorten recovery time from muscle strain
- Improve blood circulation
- Stretch ligaments and tendons
- Relieve stress and tension
- Stimulate the skin and increase its tone

Description of Swedish massage

In Swedish massage the receiving person lies undressed on a table, draped with a towel and only the massage areas are covered each time. Swedish massage is usually a full body massage, unless specifically requested. The masseur can use scented or unscented oils during the massage. The massage session usually lasts up to one hour.

Swedish massage techniques

Swedish massage involves the use of five basic techniques:

- Effleurage – gliding. This is the first stage of the massage, when the therapist applies the oil and warms up the muscles and relaxes the receiver with gentle gliding strokes, with the palm of the hands moving towards the heart.
- Petrissage – kneading. This Swedish massage technique resembles the kneading of dough and it involves the pinching, rolling and lifting of the tissue. Petrissage is relaxing and improves blood and lymphatic circulation.
- Friction – rubbing. Friction involves applying pressure on the receiver's muscles and this results in deep massage. The therapist uses his/her hand palms, thumbs, knuckles or the back of the forearms to apply pressure, which is then released slowly. The movement in friction can be sliding or circular.
- Vibration – pounding. The therapist gently taps the flesh with his/her hands or fingertips. This movement is done on smaller muscle groups, such as the one in the face, to relax.
- Tapotement – shaking. This phase of Swedish massage is the most invigorating, but for some people it can be too much. Also, it is better not to do tapotement for too long, as it can be over stimulating. Tapotement consists in quick and rhythmic percussions of the body. There are three types of tapotement:
 - Cupping: the therapist opens his/her hand flat, bending only the last knuckles of the hands and keeping the thumbs close to the palm. In this way the therapist taps the body of the receiver.
 - Hacking: the therapist taps the receiver's body with the outer sides of the hands, like in a karate movement
 - Pummelling: the therapist loosens his/her wrists and with relaxed hands taps the receiver's body.

Swedish massage – contraindications

Swedish massage is a very good treatment for the body, but there are some instances when it is better not to receive it. You should not have a Swedish massage if you suffer from, for example:

- vomiting or diarrhoea
- fever
- broken bones, fractures or dislocations
- unhealed sores or wounds
- body areas that are inflamed, swollen or bruised
- varicose veins
- recent surgery
- high blood pressure or heart problems
- certain kinds of cancer

In any case, if you have any other diseases or use some types of medications, check with your doctor before having a massage.