

## MT1 PRINCIPLES OF CAUTIONS AND CONTRA INDICATIONS

© GCMT 2006

### Statement of Purpose

It is essential for the practitioner to have a working knowledge of anatomy and physiology in order to understand and review any pathology present in the client. Each Person needs to be assessed and the principles of contraindications applied to ascertain if massage would do any harm.

Most massage books contain a list of contraindications, and all Awarding Bodies contain modules/elements of training in this area within their curriculum. The General Council for Massage Therapy aims to unify any differences and give guidance on a range of contra indications.

It is important to give consistent and comprehensive guidance in relation to contra-indications to:

- 1. Promote the professional image of the industry by providing consistent information to clients:**

Differing practices amongst Practitioner's results in clients being given different information in respect of the same condition and can result in confusion or lack of confidence in the safety and professionalism of Practitioners.

- 2. Protect clients by ensuring a consistent and safe approach of Practitioners.**

If, some Practitioners act responsibly but others do not, this may undermine the position of the more responsible Practitioners. It may also lead to the more 'desperate' client going for treatment to a Practitioner who may be putting them at risk.

- 3. To protect the reputation of Practitioners and the profession by ensuring an approach of Practitioners consistent with current medical thinking and the insurance position.**

- 4. To protect Practitioners and the Industry by minimising the risk of legal action and reducing the likelihood of either successful legal action or a finding of negligence on the part of a Practitioner.**

A Practitioner defending a legal claim by a client who believes he or she may have been adversely affected by treatment and successfully demonstrates the treatment did not cause harm could be found to be negligent if reasonable precautions to protect the client (such as liaising with the doctor if the client has a medical condition) had not been taken.

- 5. To ensure that treatment is not unnecessarily refused by Practitioners.**

The General Council for Massage Therapy also consider it may be helpful to have a list of common specific contra-indications divided into categories –

The rest of this document contains detailed information on:

## **CAUTIONS AND CONTRA-INDICATIONS TO MASSAGE**

Including what massage practitioners may be able to do in a given situation as well as advice on what to avoid.

### **1. Definitions**

This guidance makes use of the following terms, which are defined here:

**Caution** – a situation in which a massage Practitioner may proceed with the treatment but will need to modify techniques in the light of the client's condition e.g., using lighter pressure or refraining from the use of percussive techniques.

**Local Contra-indication** – a situation in which a local area of the client's body should not be massaged under any circumstances. This could be for the client's own comfort, to avoid spreading infection or to avoid further injury.

**Total Contra-Indications** – a situation in which no massage at all is appropriate. This is usually for reasons of practitioner protection and safety of Clients

**Practitioner Protection:** - there are very few situations in which a massage treatment, carried out with appropriate care and sensitivity, could cause a deterioration in a medical condition. Never-the-less, practitioner protection refers to cases in which massage Practitioners should be cautious about or refrain from treating clients in order to avoid:-

- possible litigation
- the distress and uncertainty should a client suffer a relapse e.g. a second stroke after having received massage therapy.
- possible infection.

### **2. Consultation**

It is essential that the Practitioner carries out a full investigation of contra-indications before commencing any treatment or therapy. Should the result of such investigation indicate the existence of a previously undiagnosed medical ailment that could be adversely affected by the massage treatment, the client is to be recommended to consult his/her medical practitioner before receiving any treatment or therapy from the Practitioner.

Further, should any known or previously diagnosed medical ailment deteriorate, the client is to be recommended to consult his/her medical practitioner before continuing with any treatment or therapy from the Practitioner.

### **3. Skeletal System Injuries**

**Fractures** - breaks in bones, varying from a hairline crack to compound fractures (complete breaks with bone penetrating the skin). These occur mostly from sports injuries or vehicle accidents. They can also occur in the elderly person, from falls, where bones are thinner and weaker.

- **Partial fractures** in which the bone is not completely broken.
- **Simple fractures** where there is a clean break that does not damage surrounding tissues or the skin.

- **Compound fractures**, where the broken ends protrude through soft tissues and the skin.

**Massage:** *Local* contra-indication to massage.

- The rest of the body can be massaged normally.
- Massage other areas of the body that have been overused to compensate for this restriction.
- Gentle massage of muscles adjacent to the fracture may be attempted once the bone is well set.

**Sprains** - damage to ligaments through forceful overstretching, and often involving damage to the joint. Most common sprains are a twisted ankle, and injuries to the ligaments of the knees, especially in sport. Damage can be chronic or acute, and range from a few torn fibres to a complete tear. Sprained ligaments swell up and are painful. Muscles surrounding a sprain tighten to stabilise the joint. Ligaments have poor blood circulation, so are slow to heal.

**Massage:** **DO NOT** attempt to massage acute injuries unless you are trained to do so.

- After the acute stage has subsided, draining strokes can be helpful to disperse swelling.
- Massage the muscles that are taking over from the ligaments to stabilise the joint for temporarily relaxation.
- When the joint has healed, reawaken it through gentle movements.
- Massage other areas of the body that are being overused to compensate (e.g. the other leg, if there's an ankle sprain).

**Bursitis** - inflammation of a bursa through pressure, friction or injury, leading to pain that is aggravated by movement, e.g. prolonged kneeling can lead to **housemaid's knee**.

**Massage:** When the condition is acute, massage is only a local contra-indication.

- In the non-acute phases, massage of the surrounding muscles and passive movements within a comfortable range are useful.
- Massage on other body areas that are being overused in compensation is also helpful.

**Spinal curvature** – The natural curves and small postural imbalances in each person's spine become problematic when these curves become exaggerated, and rigidify into unbalanced positions, due to inherited factors, accidents, or poor posture over a long time. A **kyphosis** is a pronounced curve in the upper spine ('a hunchback'). A **lordosis** (a 'swayback') is a curve in the lower back. Cervical lordosis is an excessive curve in the neck. A **scoliosis** is a pronounced lateral deviation (curve).

**Massage:** Massage will usually help to reduce muscular tension and regain some mobility.

- Use cushions or pillows to ensure the client has adequate support

#### 4. Skeletal System Diseases

**Osteoporosis** ('brittle bones') - is fairly common in elderly people, particularly women after menopause. The calcium content of the bone reduces, and the bones become soft and

crumbly, and liable to break easily on sudden impact, especially the wrist and hip. There may be chronic back pain and, in the advanced stages, the vertebrae may collapse.

**Massage:** Do not massage over known osteoporotic areas.

- Massage should be gentle, with no stretches, joint manipulations or use of percussive strokes. The main intention is to help the client relax.
- Negotiate comfortable positions and use of supports with the client. Take particular care in getting the client on and off the table.
- Be cautious when massaging an older person, particularly women, as they may unknowingly have osteoporosis. Feel your way carefully as you increase the pressure of the massage.

**Osteomalacia** - a softening of the bones. In the absence of Vitamin D, the bones soften and swell.

**Rickets** - the childhood variety of osteomalacia.

**Massage** – Gentle massage for the relief of symptoms should only be done under doctor's supervision.

**Paget's disease** - a fairly rare disease, where bone is replaced by fibrous tissue that then becomes hard and brittle, with much pain. Bones most commonly affected are the skull, spine and leg bones.

**Massage** – Gentle massage for the relief of symptoms should only be done under doctor's supervision.

## 5. Joint Problems

The terms **Arthritis** and **Rheumatism** are often used interchangeably in everyday language. Arthritis means inflammation of joints – with pain, stiffness and loss of movement. Rheumatism usually refers to aches or pains that come from muscles, tendons or ligaments. There are many varieties of arthritis. It can arise from other conditions.

**Osteoarthritis** - 'wear and tear' of the joints, especially the weight bearing joints, most commonly hips and knees. Hyaline cartilage thins and is worn away, cracks appear, and bony growths can develop so that bone rubs on bone. Joints are stiff, often with pain, swelling and sometimes inflammation.

**Massage:** Local massage and movement is contra-indicated in the acute phases.

- At other times, massage can be beneficial in providing some pain relief.
- Gentle mobilisation of the joints may prevent further deterioration, provided extra care is taken around painful joints.

**Rheumatoid arthritis** is an auto-immune disease, which can cause inflammation of many parts of the body (e.g. skin, lungs, eyes and internal organs) as well as joints. Not necessarily constant, it can flare up and then die down. Most commonly affects the hands and feet, and sometimes the neck. The synovial membrane of the joint is inflamed, the fluid builds up and the joint swells. If it progresses, the cartilage and bone are affected - the joints may be deformed and/or fused together.

**Massage:** Massage and movement is contra-indicated in acute stages.

- In non-acute phases, gentle massage of the tissues around the joints may help relieve pain.
- Careful movements of joints can be used to increase mobility.
- Stretches or manipulations of the spine are contra-indicated, particularly in the cervical region.
- General massage may help reduce stress – a factor in the flaring up of the disease.

**Ankylosing spondylitis** - an inherited auto-immune disease that mostly affects men in their mid-teens to mid-thirties, in which sections of the spine gradually fuse together. It commonly starts as lower back pain and stiffness, especially around the sacrum. It may stay there or progress up the spine, and occasionally affect joints outside the spine. It can flare up at times, and there may also be inflammation of the lungs, heart, eyes and other organs.

**Massage:** In acute phases, massage is contra-indicated in areas of pain and inflammation.

- Massage in the early stages can help maintain some mobility.
- Be careful about putting pressure on muscles near the spine, as they may be involved in protective splinting of the vulnerable areas.
- If the whole spine has fused, massage can help relax the spinal muscles.

A '**slipped**' **disc** (a **herniated disc**) is compression of a nerve root when a vertebral disc ruptures and part of the contents is displaced onto the spinal cord or more often on the nerve roots.

**Note that** people sometimes refer to any sharp back pain as a slipped disc, but an actual slipped disc is very painful and debilitating.

**Massage:** In acute stages, refer client to osteopath, chiropractor, physioPractitioner. In non-acute stage, massage may relax associated muscle tensions.

## 6. Muscular System - Overuse Problems

**Muscle overuse** - often painful, can cause stiffness and reduced circulation. It can range from minor temporary stiffness or strains to the chronic and incapacitating repetitive strain injuries.

**Massage:** Do not massage muscles if you suspect injuries, such as bruising or tearing of muscle fibres, unless you are trained to treat sports injuries.

- If there are no injuries, massage is helpful on overused or overworked muscles.
- Massage the other limb or other areas of the body, which may be working harder than usual to compensate for the loss of function.
- Note that muscles can also tighten to protect injuries. If you are concerned that this might be the case, don't apply pressure, and be careful when doing passive movements.

**Spasms and Cramp** - are involuntary contractions of a muscle, usually accompanied by pain. Cramps are short-lived, acute contractions, which occur most commonly in the calf muscles; spasms are low-grade, long-lasting conditions. They are commonly caused by lack of oxygen to a muscle, either through overworking the muscle or because of chronic tension in the muscle that is impeding the blood supply. It can also be due to a lack of calcium or magnesium.

**Massage:** is contraindicated for acute cramps.

- Stretch the muscle to relieve the cramp.
- When the cramp has reduced, massage can help the muscle to relax.
- Regular massage and stretching exercises can reduce long-term spasms.

**Strain** (pulled muscle) – this is stretching or tearing of muscle fibres due to sudden force. It can range from just stretching, through a few torn muscle fibres with perhaps a little bleeding, to major tearing of the muscle tissue with considerable bleeding, or even complete rupture of the muscle and/or tendon (most commonly the Achilles tendon). Minor tears may give rise to scar tissue. Major tears cause extreme pain and need hospital treatment.

**Massage:** **DO NOT** attempt to massage acute injuries, e.g. bruising, or if you suspect that there may be bruising, unless you are trained to do so.

- Massage of mild strains may be beneficial after 48 hours, to improve circulation. If you are uncertain of the appropriateness of massage, consult a sports trainer or physioPractitioner
- When the injury has healed, massage and stretching are beneficial.

**Tendonitis** - the result of a strain that can occur in a tendon, often at the junction with the muscle or with the periosteum. This gives rise to inflammation, pain and stiffness.

**Massage:** should not be done in the acute stage, but is helpful when this has passed.

**Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)** refers to any overuse condition, e.g. strain, tendonitis or fibrositis.

**Carpal Tunnel Syndrome** - the most common type of RSI. Overuse or awkward use of the flexor muscles of the forearm can inflame the tendons which swell up, putting pressure on the nerves and blood vessels that also pass through the carpal tunnel (under the retinaculum) at the front of the wrist. Results can be weakness and numbness or tingling in the hands. It can also be one of the side effects to Hypothyroidism.

**Massage:** carefully in acute stages, but firm massage on the relevant muscles at other times.

### **Inflammatory conditions**

**Frozen shoulder** - involves painful damage to the muscles and the ligaments that stabilise the shoulder joint, and the consequent instinctive restriction of movement in the joint.

**Deltoid bursitis.** - Inflammation of the bursa beneath the deltoid muscle, which happens most often in tennis players and gymnasts.

**Housemaid's knee** - refers to inflammation of any of the bursae near the knee joint.

**Tennis elbow** - tendonitis of the muscles of the back of the forearm, at their insertion, caused by excessive hammering or sawing type movements, or a tense, awkward grip on a tennis racquet.

**Ankle tendon injuries** - most common in runners. The Achilles tendon is susceptible to strains. At the insertion with the calcaneus is a bursa that can become inflamed.

**Massage:** **DO NOT** massage directly on areas of painful inflammation.

- Massage of the surrounding muscles may help relieve pain, and prevent immobilisation if a joint is involved.

**Fibrosis** - strictly speaking, refers to inflammation in the muscle with accompanying soreness or pain, which may lead to the formation of scar tissue. One cause is chronic muscular tension.

**Massage** applied appropriately can be helpful.

**Fibrositis and muscular rheumatism** - terms for a condition that involves chronic muscle pain and tenderness.

**Massage:** should be done carefully so that it doesn't cause irritation.

**Fibromyalgia** - a condition involving chronic muscle pain and tender points.

**Massage:** is helpful.

- Take care not to over treat clients, as they are extremely sensitive to pain.

**Shin splints** - lower leg problems, due to overuse or misalignment in the ankle. They involve strain or injury to the tibialis anterior and posterior muscles and possible hairline fractures to the tibia.

**Massage:** is indicated for mild shin splints.

- is contra-indicated for acute cases.
- Severe shin splints need medical attention.

## 7. Muscular System Diseases

Some rare conditions are caused by disease processes.

**Muscular dystrophy** - a group of diseases, that are inherited and cause progressive weakening and degeneration of the skeletal muscle.

**Myasthenia gravis** - a disease of the immune system, that affects nerve impulses to the muscles, resulting in muscle weakness and fatigue. The limb muscles and those to do with speech, swallowing and chewing are most affected.

**Massage:** Gentle massage may help to relieve pain or muscle spasm.

- If there is loss of feeling, be very careful when moving limbs.
- In myasthenia gravis, medication may reduce immune system functioning, so take care not to expose the client to infection.

## 8. Disorders of the Nervous System

Some disorders, especially those that involve the blood supply to the brain such as meningitis, brain haemorrhage and brain tumours, are potentially, life threatening.

**Note that meningitis can be contagious.**

**Massage:** Although most forms of massage are unlikely to precipitate a fatality, these disorders are total **contra-indications** in order to protect the practitioner.

- People who have recovered are perfectly fine to receive a massage.

**Stroke** - occurs when the blood supply to the brain tissue is affected, either by a clot (thrombosis) or by a blood vessel bursting. Some of the brain tissue may be damaged, which may result in loss of speech, movement, thinking ability, and sphincter control.

**Massage:** There is a high risk of a second stroke occurring within one month of the first; do not massage someone at all during this period, for their and your own protection.

- Lower risk of a stroke occurring up to six months after the first; ask the doctor regarding the advisability of massage.

**Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA)**- a mini-stroke from which the person recovers with little or no damage. More often caused by clots in the vessels in the neck, than clots in the head.

**Massage:** High risk of further TIA's, so medical advice should be sought before giving massage.

**Severe headaches** - that come on suddenly, with no previous history of similar headaches, and dizziness or numbness or sleepiness.

**Massage:** Massage is contraindicated; these need medical attention.

**Epilepsy**, - caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain. It ranges from momentary lapses in attention, to the 'grand mal', or major fits.

**Massage:** General massage is probably safe, but it is advisable to seek GP input.

- Probably best to avoid energy work to the head area, and to work with grounding energy instead.

**Disorders that affect motor nerve supply** - often result in muscle tremors or weakness.

**Massage:** can be beneficial to stimulate circulation bringing nutrients to the muscles and removing wastes.

- Negotiate the treatment with the client, since symptoms vary from person to person, and may vary for the same individual over time. **(If in doubt, ask the client to get medical clearance from his/her doctor).**
- Take care with pressure and joint movements, as there may also be sensory loss and the client may not be able to give good feedback
- People who are non-ambulant can develop thin skin on the soles of the feet and may be at risk of developing pressure sores.
- Take care when assisting the person into position for treatment if he suffers poor muscle control or tremors.

**Parkinson's disease** - a progressive disease, caused by degenerative abnormalities in the brain and characterised by a tremor, or shaking in the hands and limbs and by stiffness in movements.

**Massage:** is indicated, under medical supervision, to maintain flexibility and reduce anxiety.

- Sufferers usually have restricted movement so may not be able to get on to the massage table, so work with client in a chair or on the floor.

**Myalgic encephalitis (ME)** – this is a chronic fatigue syndrome resulting in fatigue and general aches and pains in the muscles.

**Massage:** negotiate the pressure and quality of touch, because the pain may be severe at times.

**Multiple sclerosis (MS)** – this is caused by degeneration of nerve sheaths. Severity of symptoms can vary, may include loss of vision, weakness and numbness in the legs.

**Massage:** is indicated in sub acute stages, when the client is in remission.

**Neuralgia**, - (also called neuropathy), refers to any condition affecting the peripheral nerves. **Neuritis** is inflammation of a nerve. Nerve entrapment occurs when a nerve presses against surrounding soft tissue and nerve impingement when it is trapped against hard tissue like bone or cartilage. Symptoms range from the familiar pins and needles, and tingling, to pain, numbness and loss of muscular function. Muscles contract protectively around pain.

**Massage:** Light massage to relieve muscle tension can be beneficial.

- Deep massage on the site is contra-indicated. Osteopathy may be more beneficial.

**Shingles**, - a viral infection of the sensory nerves, which causes a blistering rash, usually around the ribs, but sometimes on the face.

**Massage:** This is a local contra-indication.

**Trigeminal neuralgia** – this is a disorder of one of the facial nerves causing acute pain.

**Massage:** is locally contraindicated during acute episodes.

- At other times, use massage with the client's guidance.

**Lumbago** - a general term for lower back pain.

**Massage:** Massage is useful for muscular causes and for the tensions that develop due to other causes.

- Refer the client to an appropriate professional to address spinal problems (Osteopath, Chiropractor or PhysioPractitioner).

**Sciatica** – this is a condition that refers to pain along the sciatic nerve. It is most often felt in the buttocks and thighs, and is commonly caused by entrapment of the long sciatic nerve as it exits from the spine.

**Massage:** Massage is indicated for sciatica due to muscular or ligamentous causes.

- For spinal causes, massage can be helpful at non-acute times

**Migraines** - a particularly potent form of headache, in which constriction of the blood vessels around the temples is followed by dilation of the blood vessels of the brain, putting pressure on the meninges. This can produce a 'throbbing' headache with sensitivity to light and nausea for a few hours or days.

**Massage:** Massage during a migraine is not advisable (and wouldn't be wanted).

- Daily massage of the temporalis and masseter muscles can be useful as part of a treatment programme.

- Regular massage can help reduce stress levels.

**Conditions That Affect Awareness of Reality** - Some neurological disorders affect a person's sense of reality, or the ability to comprehend or communicate about what is happening.

**Massage:** When treating people with severe learning difficulties, or autism or dementia, it is important to ensure as much as possible that the treatment and procedure is fully understood,

- Be sensitive to non-verbal cues from the client, and also seek guidance from any carers to interpret these.

**Drink and Drugs** -Alcohol, recreational and some prescription drugs have an affect on the nervous system, and can distort perception of sensory input.

**Massage:** It is advisable to avoid massaging a person whose perception is seriously distorted.

- The autonomic nervous system can be stimulated or soothed by massage, depending on the techniques used. Relaxing massage stimulates parasympathetic activity. Regular treatment may facilitate an improvement in the balance of autonomic nervous system (ANS) functioning in someone with a tendency towards high stress levels.
- Massage (especially petrissage - kneading, squeezing and wringing) can also relieve chronic muscular tension resulting from elevated sympathetic nervous system activity.

## 9. Endocrine System - Disorders

**Imbalance of Pineal/Pituitary Glands functioning** - underlies conditions such as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

**Massage:** Relaxing massage may be helpful to relieve depression and tiredness.

**Hypothyroidism** (under activity of the thyroid gland) - can cause weight gain and fatigue, and sometimes *myxoedema*, in which the skin and other body tissues thicken. **Hyperthyroidism**, (overproduction of thyroxin) causes hyperactivity, wasting of muscles and weight loss. **Goitre** is enlargement of the thyroid gland, due to too much or too little thyroxin.

**Massage:** is not contra-indicated, except to avoid the neck area in a person with goitre.

**Adrenal Gland problems** - Over production of one of the adrenal hormones (Cushing's syndrome) can cause obesity, limb wasting, oedema, high blood pressure, thin skin and osteoporosis. Underproduction (Addison's disease), which is rare, can cause muscle weakness, dehydration, hypotension and hypoglaecemia.

**Massage:** is not contra-indicated.

**Diabetes** - is a disorder of the pancreas. When it fails to produce enough insulin, blood sugar levels in the blood and urine rise. Symptoms include frequent urination, thirst, and tiredness. Mild diabetes can be controlled by diet, exercise or medication or a combination of all, while more severe forms require regular injections of insulin. Consequences include poor circulation, including the possibility of thin skin in the peripheral areas of the body.

**Massage:** is indicated for clients with healthy tissue and good circulation.

- Check for possible complications - especially thin skin in peripheral body areas, and other skin conditions, including itchy skin, spots or boils
- .

- Avoid massage on an injected area for at least an hour.
- Get information from client about possible blood sugar level drop (hypoglycaemic attack) - what symptoms to watch for, and what to do.

## 10. Skin Disorders

### **General Massage Guidelines**

- Get the client's information on medical diagnosis of any skin condition. Refer undiagnosed conditions that concern you to a medical person.
- A contagious disorder is an infection that is transmitted through direct contact. Infectious skin conditions are **always** local contra-indications to massage.
- Some infectious skin conditions are **total** contra-indications to massage, because of the risk of cross infection - impetigo (when acute), ringworm (if widespread), scabies (until cleared up).
- Never massage areas of skin that are bleeding, broken or weeping fluid. Body fluids (blood, lymph, pus) may contain infectious agents, which could be transmitted to the Practitioner or other parts of the client's body.
- Always clean linen and couch surfaces after treatment.
- Negotiation is important with a person who has a non-infectious skin condition. Someone with a skin condition may feel sensitive or embarrassed about their appearance, and may be concerned that you might not want to touch it.

Dermatology is the study, diagnosis and treatment of skin disorders, some of which, like eczema, are very common and some very rare. Since many rashes, spots, lesions or sores can be quite hard for a doctor to diagnose, it is certainly not part of a massage Practitioner's job to identify clients' skin disorders. However, it is important to know the names of the common disorders and whether or not a condition is infectious. People with chronic skin conditions know whether they have psoriasis or eczema, for example, and will be able to give you that information. Undiagnosed conditions require that you follow commonsense guidelines for massage and maybe refer your client to a doctor.

### **Non-infectious Skin Conditions**

**Thin skin** - common in very elderly people. If the blood supply to the skin becomes restricted, new growth slows. Skin becomes thin and papery, less elastic and liable to tear easily. Thin skin occurs over varicose veins; over areas of chronic oedema (swelling); through prolonged use of steroid creams; on extensive healed scar tissue from burns, injury or medical treatment.

**Massage:** Gentle over areas of thin skin. **NO** stretching or friction, which could cause tearing.

**Skin cancer** is the most common form of cancer.

**Massage** All skin cancers are local contra-indications.

- Suggest clients get all unusual skin conditions checked over by a doctor.

**Bruising** - discolouration and pain caused by internal, superficial bleeding.

**Massage** A local contra-indication.

- Massage of surrounding areas may help healing by helping circulation (nutrients in, wastes out).

**Blisters** are caused by an accumulation of lymph below the surface of the skin in response to friction or pressure.

**Massage** This is a local contra-indication.

**Bedsores / pressure sores** - occur when an area of skin is subjected to continuous pressure, the blood supply to the area is cut off and cells begin to die. This can happen to people who are bedridden, or who wear casts or braces. A local contra-indication, but gentle massage of surrounding areas may help improve circulation flow.

**Vitiligo** - a disorder of the melanin pigment in the skin. Patches of skin lose their colour, and their protection against the sun's rays.

**Massage** NOT a contra-indication.

**Liver or age spots** - brown spots found on the skin of older people.

**Massage** NOT a contra-indication.

- This is not a contra-indication.

**Skin tags** - little growths attached to the skin by a tiny stalk, and are common in older people.

**Massage:** This is not a contra-indication.

Avoid vigorous massage or friction that could break the stalks and cause bleeding.

**Eczema** - a group of diseases (e.g. dermatitis), in which there is inflammation of the skin with redness, itching or burning, and at times, weeping or blistering or formation of scales.

**Contact dermatitis** - skin inflammation caused by contact with a chemical such as washing powder, perfume, or fabric dye.

**Massage** NOT a contra-indication unless the skin is weeping.

**Psoriasis** - a condition where the epidermal cells grow too fast, and reach the surface of the skin without being properly keratinised, clumping together to form thick red scaly plaques. Most common on elbows, knees, scalp and back.

**Massage** NOT a contra-indication unless the skin is broken.

**Stretch marks** - white lines caused by sudden stretching of the skin as a result of pregnancy, weight gain, or bodybuilding.

**Massage:** Deep massage or friction is contra-indicated.

## **Infectious Skin Conditions**

### **Bacterial infections**

**Acne (vulgaris)** - common in teenagers, due to an increase in sebaceous gland activity, causing white heads. Severe acne can leave scarring.

**Massage** A local contra-indication depending on the severity and degree of inflammation.

**Impetigo** - typified by raised fluid filled sores and crusts on the face, particularly round the mouth and nose, most commonly found in children.

**Massage** Highly contagious, so total contraindication if sores are weeping, or person is not undergoing medical treatment.

- Local contra-indication if person recovering.

**Boils and carbuncles** - caused by infection round a hair root or sweat gland, with pain, swelling and formation of pus. A carbuncle is a collection of boils.

**Massage:** These are local contra-indications.

- Massage of surrounding areas may help healing by improving circulation flow.

### **Viral infections**

**Herpes** - an infection causing clusters of sore blisters. Once present in the body the herpes virus cannot be removed; it may lie dormant, but erupt in times of stress. There are two kinds; the common cold sores found round the mouth, and genital herpes that are transmitted sexually.

**Massage:** Cold sores are a local contra-indication.

- Take extra care with hygiene, as the virus can survive outside the body for a few hours.

**Warts** - small, rough, non-malignant tumours caused by viruses, which can disappear spontaneously. (Verrucas are warts on the soles of the feet.)

**Massage:** They are local contra-indications.

### **Fungal infections**

**Ringworm** - looks as if a little worm has burrowed a red itchy circle under the skin (but is not caused by a worm). It is contagious.

**Massage:** Total contra-indication if large areas of the body are affected.

- Local contra-indication, if only a small area is affected and can be covered.
- Take particular care with hygiene precautions.

### **Parasites**

**Athlete's foot** - an itchy infection, between the toes, causing mushy skin.

**Massage:** This is a local contra-indication.

**Scabies** - caused by a tiny parasite that crawls under the skin and lays its eggs. Commonly found on the wrists, and between the fingers. Extremely itchy.

**Massage:** A total contra-indication until cleared up, to protect the practitioner.

**Head lice** - blood sucking lice, with a preference for the head (other varieties prefer the pubic area). The white eggs are called 'nits'.

**Massage:** A total contra-indication until cleared up, to protect the practitioner.

## **11. Respiratory Disorders**

Disorders in the respiratory tract are common, because of the direct connection with the environment and exposure to bacteria, viruses and pollutants. Disorders of the upper part of the tract, from the nose to the larynx, are less serious than those affecting the lower part.

### **Infectious Respiratory Disorders**

#### **Massage:**

- Many of the common respiratory disorders are infectious during the initial acute phase, including pulmonary TB, pneumonia and bronchitis. During this time they should be considered as contraindications for the practitioner's protection.
- Massage of the muscles involved in breathing can be very helpful for people with respiratory disorders. Some disorders result in a build up of phlegm in the lungs, which can be loosened by percussion over the ribcage.
- Breathing difficulties are often made worse by lying flat. If this is the case, it may be necessary to use supports to prop the client in a semi-sitting position, or in a side lying position.

The **common cold** and **influenza** are both caused by viruses. There are hundreds of cold viruses around all the time, but 'flu viruses tend to come in epidemics.

**Sinusitis** - inflammation of the air spaces in the head, causing pain and tenderness.

**Laryngitis** - causes a sore throat and hoarseness or loss of voice.

**Massage:** is contraindicated in the acute stage, because it will help spread the virus through the client's body.

**Pneumonia** - means inflammation of the alveoli and causes coughing, fever and chest pain. There are a number of causes, including bacteria, virus, chemicals or allergy.

**Massage:** is indicated during the non-acute phase.

**Sinusitis** -inflammation of the sinuses around the nose.

**Massage:** is helpful for chronic sinusitis.

**Tuberculosis (TB)** - a bacterial infection which once killed hundreds of people, and is on the increase again. It can occur in various body tissues. Only pulmonary TB can be transmitted by breathing in droplets from coughs and sneezes in the air. Other forms of TB are not contagious.

**Massage:** is fine when the client has been on medication for at least a month and has had medical clearance.

**Bronchitis** - refers to inflammation of the bronchi and/or bronchioles, resulting in overproduction of mucus. Acute bronchitis often follows an upper respiratory infection.

**Massage:** is fine when the client has recovered from bronchitis.

### **Inflammatory Respiratory Disorders**

**Asthma** - a common condition, which causes restriction in the bronchioles, causing attacks of breathing difficulties. It is often worsened by stress.

**Massage:** is useful when client not having an attack.

- Massage of the muscles involved in breathing can be very helpful, including percussion over the back of the ribs.
- Breathing difficulties are often made worse by lying flat. If this is the case, it may be necessary to use supports to prop the client in a semi-sitting position, or in a side lying position.

**Emphysema-** where the walls of the alveoli are destroyed and breathing becomes difficult; can develop from bronchitis.

**Massage:** is indicated under medical supervision.

**Pleurisy** - a very painful inflammation of the pleural membranes, often caused by lung infections such as pneumonia.

**Massage:** gentle massage can be beneficial to the upper back and chest areas.

### **Other Respiratory Disorders**

**Lung cancer** - the growth of malignant tumours in the lungs, which spread to the lymph system and other organs of the body. It is the most common form of cancer in men. The number of women affected is rising due to smoking.

**Massage:** a useful stress reliever, especially when undergoing treatment. Usual cautions around clients undergoing chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

## **12. The Cardiovascular System**

**Massage:** When massaging the limbs with firm pressure, work towards the heart, to avoid putting pressure on the valves in the veins.

- Never put heavy or prolonged pressure on the major superficial arteries, such as the carotid artery at the side of the neck, the radial artery on the inner surface of the wrist, and the arteries on the inner surface of the elbow joint and the back of the knee.

### **The Heart - Disorders**

- Heart disorders can be caused by a restricted supply of blood to the heart, or by faulty heart structure, or by disease of the heart tissues.

**Angina** - caused by inadequate blood supply to the heart muscle. Symptoms are cramp-like pains in the chest, which are made worse by exercise or stress, and relieved by rest.

**Unstable angina** - a severe form of angina, which can be a precursor to a heart attack.

**Massage:** Relaxing massage is beneficial for people with angina because it can reduce stress.

- Massage for anyone with unstable angina should only be carried out with permission from the person's doctor.
- Keep the client warm, since cold can bring about an attack.

**Heart attack** (a myocardial infarction) - occurs when part of the heart muscle dies due to inadequate blood supply, caused by blood clots, or arteriosclerosis. These deposits clog the

vessels, and can break free. Heart attack symptoms - sudden severe pain in the chest and, sometimes, the left arm.

**Massage:** Because there is a very high risk of a reoccurrence in the two to three months after the attack, massage is contra-indicated for patient/ practitioner protection

- After that period massage can be given with advice from the client's doctor.

**Heart failure** - occurs if the heart is unable to perform its function as a pump properly, and fluid can back up in the lungs, causing pulmonary oedema ('water on the lungs') or oedema in the ankles and legs. Heart failure can be caused by a number of different factors, including previous heart attacks or chronic high blood pressure.

**Massage:** Get medical permission, and then give only gentle massage to avoid stressing a weak heart.

**High blood pressure**, (hypertension), - when long-term, can lead to damage of the heart or brain. Once diagnosed, it is usually controlled with medication.

**Massage:** Deep abdominal massage is contra-indicated, but relaxing massage is probably beneficial to keep stress levels down.

- If someone has high blood pressure that is not controlled by medication, get medical permission, for client/practitioner protection.

**Low blood pressure** (hypo tension) is not considered a medical problem.

**Massage:** Take care helping someone with low blood pressure off the table because moving from lying to sitting too quickly may cause them to faint.

### **Blood Vessels Disorders**

Blockage of blood vessels occurs when a blood clot forms on the wall, or when an obstruction such as a clot (a 'thrombus'), or air bubble, or a dislodged particle of plaque is moved in the bloodstream to another site. Anticoagulants are given to prevent clots growing larger.

**Thickening of the arteries** (arteriosclerosis) - a general hardening and loss of elasticity of the walls of the arteries. Arteriosclerosis is caused by a build-up of plaque in the arteries, which could lead to clot formation.

**Massage:** Seek medical permission, and then give gentle massage only.

**Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)** - a much more serious condition, where a blood clot forms in a vein, often when someone has to stay in bed after surgery, a stroke or childbirth. If the clot breaks lose it can travel through the system to the lungs, with fatal results.

**Massage:** Totally contra-indicated for 3-6 months after diagnosis, for client/practitioner protection.

- After that period, seek medical permission, and give gentle massage only.

**Varicose veins**, - usually in the legs, are the result of valve failure in the veins, and accumulation of pockets of blood. The vein walls, being thin, stretch and become flabby.

**Massage:** Massage is contra-indicated in the area directly over, or immediately below the veins. The affected area can be held gently while the rest of the leg is massaged.

**Phlebitis** - Varicose veins can become red, tender and inflamed, painful, and there may be a risk of clots. It affects the superficial veins only, with virtually no risk of clots entering the circulation.

**Massage:** Massage of the affected area is contra-indicated.

**Oedema** - an accumulation of fluid in the tissues, due to lack of draining.

**Massage:** depends on the cause of the swelling, so needs to be discussed with a medical person.

### **Blood disorders**

**Haemophilia** - an inherited failure of the blood to clot.

**Massage:** severe haemophilia is a total contraindication to massage.

**Mild forms** - gentle massage, consult a doctor.

**Anaemia** - results from a lack of red blood cells or haemoglobin and the capacity of the blood to carry oxygen to the tissues is reduced. It is a sign of an underlying disorder.

**Sickle cell anaemia** - an inherited condition found in peoples of Black African descent, in which the red cells are deformed, and the ability to carry oxygen reduced.

**Thalassaemia** - another inherited form of anaemia common to people of Turkish or Cypriot descent. Symptoms of all the anaemia's are fatigue, headaches, insomnia and joint pain.

**Massage:** Massage is fine for mild anaemia, but contraindicated for severe anaemia.

**Leukaemia ('cancer of the blood')** - develops when immature white blood cells multiply excessively, interfering with the ability of normal white cells and platelets to do their work.

**Massage:** Seek medical permission and then use gentle massage.

### **13. Immune System - Disorders**

**Allergic reactions** - the immune system over-reacts to harmless material and treats it as a dangerous invader. Common allergies are hay fever, allergic asthma and skin rashes, including eczema.

**Massage:** Use appropriate base oil, don't use essential oils.

**Autoimmune diseases** - caused by the immune system reacting against the body's own tissue, such as vitiligo (in the skin) and rheumatoid arthritis (QV).

**Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)** - caused by the HIV virus transmitted in infected body fluids. Symptoms of HIV infection include insomnia, night sweats, weight loss, diarrhoea, and skin disorders.

**Massage:** If the person is fatigued, weak or unwell, use gentle massage.

- Do not massage the site of an injection for an hour or so after injection.
- Avoid open cuts or weeping skin.
- Be thorough in hygiene - cover your own cuts with band-aids, and wash all linen thoroughly.

**Cancer** - Cells proliferate too rapidly, grow out of control and large masses of abnormal tissue develop into tumours. Benign tumours are not harmful, unless they are exerting

pressure on other internal organs. Malignant tumours (cancers) can spread rapidly, invading other types of tissues. The most common cancers in men are of the lung, colon, prostate and pancreas: in women, of the lung, colon, uterus and breast.

**Massage** generally beneficial for people with cancer. It can provide comfort and relief from emotional stress, may help to temporarily relieve pain and it may help with sleeping difficulties, minor digestive problems and muscular stiffness.

- Do not massage directly over any tumour or site of cancer, or areas currently receiving radiotherapy.
- Observe the usual contra-indications about broken skin, infections, recent scar tissue, and cardiovascular complications. Be aware that chemotherapy and radiotherapy can cause thin skin.

**Lymphoedema** - a painful oedema resulting from damage to the lymphatic system.

**Massage:** Manual Lymph Drainage is useful (if you are trained to do it).

#### 14. Disorders of the Digestive System

- When doing firm massage on the abdomen it is essential to follow the direction of the large intestine, circling in a clockwise direction, so as to help the direction of flow of material in the large intestine.
- Massage may be very soothing in some cases of abdominal pain; period pain, for example, may be relieved by stroking (period pain originates in the uterus but can affect the whole lower abdomen).

**Nausea** - can have many causes, including travel sickness, early pregnancy, food poisoning and infection.

**Massage:** not contra-indicated unless severe enough to cause vomiting.

**Indigestion or heartburn** - can be worse after eating.

**Massage:** recommend that client has massage when they have an empty stomach.

- All the following affect the stomach or intestines, and can be painful.

**Ulcers** of the stomach or duodenum – occur when the balance of acid in the gastric juices is upset.

**Massage:** Gentle massage on the abdomen.

**Colitis** - can be in either of two forms; **ulcerative colitis** refers to ulcers on the wall of the colon or rectum, and **irritable bowel syndrome** refers to a situation where the peristaltic waves in the bowel become irregular.

**Massage:** Gentle massage on the abdomen.

**Crohn's disease** - a chronic inflammation of any part of the wall of the bowel, and is becoming more common. Like ulcers, it may be linked to a 'Western lifestyle'.

**Massage:** Gentle massage on the abdomen.

**Diverticulitis** - refers to little pouches that protrude outward on the wall of the large intestine, and can become inflamed and painful.

**Massage:** Gentle massage on the abdomen.

## 15. Disorders of the Abdominal Organs

**Hepatitis** - inflammation of the liver can be caused by viruses, and, if so, is infectious in the acute stage.

**Massage:** is contra-indicated in acute stages for client/practitioner protection.

**Cirrhosis of the liver** - can also occur as a result of hepatitis, and is sometimes associated with alcoholism. The healthy liver cells die, and are replaced with fatty fibrous tissues.

**Massage:** is contraindicated for advanced cirrhosis.

**Gallstones** - are hard little deposits in the gall bladder. A person with gallstones may not be aware of their existence; it is only when the stones try to pass down the bile duct that they cause severe pain.

**Massage:** is fine when the client is not in pain.

**Hiatus hernia** - refers to a condition where part of the stomach protrudes through the diaphragm into the thorax.

**Massage:** Clients are usually more comfortable sitting than lying and should be massaged with their upper body raised.

**Abdominal hernia** - occurs when part of the abdominal organs protrude through the muscles of the abdominal wall.

**Massage:** An abdominal hernia is a local contra-indication.

## 16. Urinary System Disorders

**Massage:** Massage is contra-indicated for those with acute urinary tract infections, acute or chronic renal failure, acute stages of gout, or a kidney stone attack.

- It is locally contra-indicated for joints affected with gout or on the abdomen in non-acute stages of urinary tract infection.
- Sensitivity to embarrassment, or frequent need to urinate, is important if working with someone with cystitis or incontinence.
- Due to the exposed position of the kidneys, avoid heavy percussion on the back between the lowest ribs and the pelvis.

**Incontinence** - involuntary urination, more common in the elderly and in women who have had children. Stress incontinence occurs through laughing, running or strenuous activity.

**Urinary tract infections** - common and include inflammation of the bladder and cystitis, which is more common in women, and causes burning pain when urinating.

**Kidney stones** - small hard deposits found in the kidneys, similar to gallstones in the gall bladder. They can be very painful, especially when they are passing down the ureters.

**Renal failure** - a rare and dangerous condition, where the kidneys have stopped functioning. Treatment is with dialysis on a kidney machine.

**Gout** - due to a build-up of uric acid in the body and affects the joints, most often the big toe joint. An attack of gout is extremely painful.

## 17. Reproductive System

**Pregnancy** - The growth of the foetus in the womb.

**Massage:** Abdominal massage is contraindicated during first three months due to high possibility of miscarriage.

- Deep abdominal massage is contraindicated for rest of pregnancy.
- Make sure the client is in a comfortable position.
- Take care with stretches late in pregnancy when hormones soften ligaments.

**Menstruation** - the periodic monthly discharge through the vagina of a bloody secretion containing tissue debris from the shedding of the endometrium from the non-pregnant uterus.

**Massage:** Massage to address abdominal cramps, sensitivity in the abdomen, lower back or thighs may be helpful or completely unwanted.

**Menopause** - At around the age of fifty, the ovaries cease to produce ova, and falling levels of oestrogen produce the signs of menopause; hot flushes, cessation of menstruation, thinning of the vaginal walls, weight gain and increased risk of osteoporosis.

**Massage** May be helpful during this life transition.

### Disorders of the Female Reproductive System

**Discharge from a vaginal infection** - such as chlamydia, thrush (a fungal infection) or non-specific urethritis (NSU).

**Massage:** **Not** a contra-indication to massage.

**Fibroids** - slow growing, benign tumours of the uterus wall. They are rarely painful but can cause heavy periods, and a dragging sensation in the abdomen.

**Massage:** **Not** a contra-indication to massage.

- Sensitivity to a woman's feelings is important.

**Endometriosis** - the presence of tissue from the inside of the uterus growing in other places in the body; usually in the abdominal cavity. Periods are very painful, and there may be abdominal tenderness.

**Massage:** Deep abdominal massage is contra-indicated.

**Pelvic inflammatory infection.** - Infection of the uterus and ovaries is extremely painful, and a major cause of infertility.

**Massage:** Deep abdominal massage is contra-indicated.

**Prolapsed uterus /vagina** has moved out of place, usually falling in the body.

**Massage:** Abdominal massage is contra-indicated.

### Disorders of the Male Reproductive System

**Prostate cancer** - a form of cancer common in elderly men and rarely fatal if treated in time.

**Massage:** Not a contra-indication to massage.

- Client may need to urinate more frequently.

### **Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

These include syphilis (which if untreated eventually causes central nervous system damage), gonorrhoea, non-specific urethritis, genital herpes, and genital infestations such as pubic lice and scabies. Genital scabies may indicate the presence of scabies on the hands too – do not massage.

While sexually transmitted diseases are not of direct concern in a massage treatment, there is an Act of Parliament from 1917 prohibiting the use of complementary therapies to treat syphilis, gonorrhoea or soft chancre (genital sores). Massage does not claim to treat, in the sense of diagnose and cure, medical conditions, but practitioners should be aware of this law.