



Contraindications of massage in general

Introduction

Now, massage is increasingly being used as an intervention for various pain and injury conditions, there is ever more concern about making sure it is an appropriate intervention for these different conditions. In addition, throughout the health care system, there is currently more attention being placed on reducing medical errors that lead to adverse events. Contraindications provide a basic framework for understanding when, and under what circumstances, a particular therapeutic intervention is appropriate for treating the patient with minimal risk of injury. Therefore, contraindications serve as a guideline to help us determine if we should institute certain precautions in treatment, withhold treatment altogether, or recommend alternative treatments that would be more appropriate

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 patient's body should not be massaged under any circumstances. This could be for the patient'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 patients.

Contraindications to massage therapy

1. Skeletal System Injuries
2. Skeletal System Diseases
3. Joint Problems
4. Muscular System - Overuse Problems
5. Inflammatory conditions
6. Blood Vessels Disorders

1. Skeletal System Injuries

i. Fractures: Breaking of 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.

ii. 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 fibers to a complete tear. Sprained ligaments swell up and are painful. Muscles surrounding a sprain tighten to stabilize the joint. Ligaments have poor blood circulation, so are slow to heal.

Massage: Do not attempt to massage in acute injuries.

- 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 stabilize 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).

iii. 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.

2. Skeletal System Diseases

i. Osteoporosis ('brittle bones') – It 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 patient relax.
- Negotiate comfortable positions and use of supports with the patient. Take particular care in getting the patient on and off the table.
- Be cautious when massaging an older person, particularly women, as they may unknowingly have osteoporosis. Feel the way carefully as we increase the pressure of the massage.

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

iii. Rickets - The childhood variety of osteomalacia.

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

iv. 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.

3. 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.

i. 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 mobilization of the joints may prevent further deterioration, provided extra care is taken around painful joints.

ii. 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.

iii. 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.

4. Muscular System - Overuse Problems

i. 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 we suspect injuries, such as bruising or tearing of muscle fibers.

- 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 we are concerned that this might be the case, don't apply pressure, and be careful when doing passive movements.

ii. Spasms and Cramp – They 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.

iii. Strain (pulled muscle) – this is stretching or tearing of muscle fibers due to sudden force. It can range from just stretching, through a few torn muscle fibers 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 we suspect that there may be bruising.

- Massage of mild strains may be beneficial after 48 hours, to improve circulation.
- When the injury has healed, massage and stretching are beneficial.

iv. 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.

5. Inflammatory conditions

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

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

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

iv. 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.

v. 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 immobilization if a joint is involved.

6 .Blood Vessels Disorders

i. 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 loose 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.

ii. 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.

Conclusion

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 patient. Each Person needs to be assessed and the principles of contraindications applied to ascertain if massage would do any harm

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

1. Promote the professional image of the institute by providing consistent information to patient.
2. Protect patient by ensuring a consistent and safe approach of Practitioners.
3. To ensure that treatment is not unnecessarily refused by Practitioners