Geriatric Massage Therapy (GMT)

*Enhancing the quality of life for those less active due to age or illness*
Minnie Remembers

God,
My hands are old.
I’ve never said that out loud before
but they are.
I was so proud of them once.
They were soft
like the velvet smoothness of a firm, ripe
peach.
Now the softness is more like worn-out sheets
or withered leaves.
When did these slender, graceful hands
become gnarled, shrunken claws?
When, God?
They lie here in my lap,
Naked reminders of this worn-out
Body that has served me too well!

How long has it been since someone touched
me
Twenty years?
Twenty years I’ve been a widow.
Respected, Smiled at.
But never touched.
Never held so close that loneliness
was blotted out.

I remember how my mother used to hold
me, God.
When I was hurt in spirit or flesh,
she would gather me close,
stroke my silky hair
and caress my back with her warm hands.
O God, I’m so lonely!

I remember the first boy who ever kissed me.
We were both so new at that!
The taste of young lips and popcorn,
the feeling inside of mysteries to come.

I remember Hank and the babies.
How else can I remember them but together?
Out of fumbling, awkward attempts of new
lovers came the babies.
And as they grew, so did our love.
And, God, Hank didn’t seem to mind
if my body thickened and faded a little.
He still loved it. And touched it.
And we didn’t mind if we were no longer
beautiful.
And the children hugged me a lot.
O God, I’m lonely!

God, why didn’t we raise the kids to be silly
and affectionate as well as dignified and
proper?
You see, they do their duty.
They drive up in their fine cars;
they come to my room to pay their respects.
They chatter brightly, and reminisce.
But they don’t touch me.
They call me “Mom” or “Mother”
or “Grandma.”

Never Minnie.
My mother called me Minnie.
So did my friends.
Hank called me Minnie, too.
But they’re gone.
And so is Minnie.
Only Grandma is here.
And God! She’s lonely!

Donna Swanson
Anatomy of Aging and Common Illnesses

The United States Census Bureau calculations indicate that the population will reach nearly three hundred million people in 2006; the estimated population in 1946 was one hundred forty-one million. Their numbers also indicate that 12% of these people are 65 years of age or older. That percentage translates to 36 million citizens “over 65” and is expected to increase to 63.5 Million by 2025.

2006 is also the year when the first of the Baby Boomer Generation – persons born between 1946 and 1964 – reaches age 60. More than seventy-five million people were born in the United States during this period; that was about 70% more people than were born during the preceding two decades. Boomers are seriously becoming concerned about their quality of life as they anticipate retirement and an active leisure time. Aging Baby Boomers do not want to stop “doing” as they age, and many will choose to seek and pay for goods and services that will help maintain an active lifestyle with age.

Older adults often suffer from arthritis, muscular stiffness, tendonitis, and bursitis. Massage is particularly helpful to them; improving circulation, decreasing muscular stiffness, increasing range of motion, and helping decrease inflammation of the joints. It triggers natural joint lubrication through increased circulation, which in turn improves mobility.

Older adults may also run increased risks of complications from surgery, and convalescence takes longer because damaged tissues recover more slowly. In addition, longer periods of bed rest can lead to pneumonia, bedsores, and circulatory disorders. Medications are metabolized more slowly, as well, and their effects are prolonged in the body.

Geriatric Massage Therapy (GMT) – also referred to as Massotherapy – can greatly assist and bring relief from the problems listed above and many others addressed in the coming sections. GMT is a specific form of massage designed to meet the specific needs of older adults. It involves the use of hands to manipulate the soft tissues of the body to improve blood circulation, relieve pain, and increase range of motion.

Used as a holistic massage therapy in older patients, GMT treats the client entirely and not just by their condition. It differs from general massage techniques, by using regular standard techniques that have been modified to suit the older populations. The psychological benefits associated with touch, in addition to the physiological effects of manipulating the soft tissues of the body, make massage therapy particularly important for older adults.
Older adults often suffer from a variety of such age-related diseases. Often, they may have poor blood circulation and limited physical capabilities and activity. Many of them may also be anxious, depressed, or lonely. GMT can help maintain and improve their overall health, as well as regain certain physical functions that may have been reduced or lost due to aging. Active or passive movement of the joints may be part of geriatric massage that can relieve anxiety and depression and provide comfort to touch-deprived older patients.

Every ailment associated with aging is not cured with GMT, however, it does offer a solution that can be used with routine medical care and can improve the quality of life for those who are aging.

Physiology and Function of the Older Body, Diagnoses Unique to Them:

As our senior population grows older and lives longer, the search is on for ways to cope with the issues associated with aging.

There are three types of people that Geriatric Massage recognizes. Types 2 and 3 may need special “geriatric” techniques.

1. The energized older adult that is often involved in vigorous activity and can be found to be as fit or fitter than others. You may see them at the gym, biking, hiking, etc…

2. The older adult that is more “age appropriate” and has the normal aches and pains associated with their age. They usually have one or more physical issues that require a physician’s attention.

3. The frail older adult that has quite a few physical issues that prevent them from having the quality of life they once had.

Initially, GMT presents a challenge; many physical problems complicate and interfere with diagnosis and treatment of any single illness, diseases of one organ system place stress on other systems. Some older people could also have nutritional deficiencies because of limited incomes, poor dental status, and other problems.

However, GMT is gaining acceptance in the medical community. It is being prescribed to older adults patients to improve blood circulation and relieve arthritic symptoms. Massage has been found to be helpful in dealing with other types of conditions as well. It is sometimes prescribed for Parkinson's disease patients to help improve mobility. It has also been found to help patients diagnosed with Diabetes. While most patients have to pay for this service, some insurance companies do reimburse prescribed massage treatment. As of the year 2000, however, Medicare and Medicaid does not pay for this treatment.
Geriatric Massage Therapy can offer the following benefits to help the aging:

- Helps reduce high blood pressure
- Assists with Lymphedema by stimulating the lymphatic system to begin moving fluid again.
- Increases blood circulation and helps with complications of diabetes such as leg ulcers or gangrene and diabetic neuropathy.
- Helps stroke victims and patients recovering from circulatory disease, Alzheimer's, emphysema, joint replacement, amputation, arthritis, bursitis, and even tendonitis
- Improves lymphatic flow, which increases the excretion of toxic substances from the body
- Alleviation of headache and pain
- Improved skin tone
- Improves Memory
- Speeds up of healing from injury and illness.
- Partially restores mobility lost due to Parkinson's disease, Multiple sclerosis, or arthritis.
- Mental and physical relaxation.
- Sleep disorders—Improvement in length and quality of sleep.
- Relief of stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness.
- Improvement of the patient's quality of life and self-esteem.

Clients receiving massage experience the release of endorphins, which act as a natural painkiller. This is very beneficial for those that suffer from pain on a daily basis. This targeted massage knowledge can increase coordination, strength, and flexibility while helping to improve posture, and expedite the healing process for wounds.

Physiologically, massage increases superficial blood flow and lymph flow, and causes an increase in red blood cell count and hemoglobin. Over time, massage increases serotonin levels as well as the absorption rate of medications. Moreover, it increases the delivery of nutrients to cells, softens connective tissues, reduces contractures, increases flexibility, and decreases constipation.

More important than the physical benefits of massage may be the psychological benefits mentioned earlier. The need for touch is especially important among older adults who sometimes feel isolated due to physical impairment, or suffer from impairments of the other senses, especially vision and hearing. Deprivation of touch may result in feelings of worthlessness and can result in depression. Massage helps to fill this void and provides the recipient with a sense of well-being. It has been found that massage can be particularly useful in reducing anxiety and physical agitation in Alzheimer's patients.
Below is an article in regards to massage and Alzheimer’s patients:

Alzheimer's Disease Research
Slow-Stroke Massage

Slow-stroke massage relieves physical agitation in Alzheimer’s disease

Alzheimer’s disease is a neurological disorder characterised by a loss of memory, speechlessness and paralysis. Often linked to this is agitated behaviour, which is either endured or un成功fully treated with chemical or physical restraints. However, these treatments markedly increase the stress levels on those providing care for the patient so another type of solution would be welcomed by carers.

The lack of available treatments prompted researchers at the University of Texas USA to carry out a slow-stroke massage on out-patients with Alzheimer’s disease the aim was to monitor the character and frequency of agitation using two highly correlated instruments, the Agitated Behaviour Rating Scale Scoring Guide and the Brief Behaviour Symptom Rating Scale.

The researchers found that patients' agitated behaviour increased from dawn to dusk. The patients most frequently displayed a verbal form of agitation which was not helped or diffused by the slow-stroke massage. However, the study revealed that the more physical aspects of the agitation, such as pacing, wandering, and resisting did significantly decrease after the slow-stroke massage was carried out.

This study contributes to understanding the agitation phenomenon experienced in patients with Alzheimer’s disease and helps assess the associated factors as well as the long-term management of patients suffering with this condition.

Source: J Gerontol Nurs 1999 Jun;25(6):22-34
The effectiveness of slow-stroke massage in diffusing agitated behaviours in individuals with Alzheimer's disease.
Rowe M, Alfred D

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The Effects of Geriatric Massage Therapy:

Three physical effects of therapeutic massage are well documented in scientific research: release of muscle tension, increased circulation, and generating the relaxation response. Each effect, though simple in itself, can result in multiple benefits for older adults or the ill.

Releasing muscle tension can:
- Induce mental and physical relaxation.
- Improve balance, coordination, and mobility
- Result in more restful sleep
- Lessen the need for pain or sleeping medication

Increasing circulation can:
- Induce mental and physical relaxation.
- Improve nutrition to tissues and remove waste products
- Reduce swelling caused by fluid retention
- Improve skin tone and relieve dryness and itching
- Help prevent pressure sores
- Speed healing from injuries and surgery
- Increase energy

Generating the relaxation response can:
- Induce mental and physical relaxation.
- Assist with conditions where stress may be a factor such as headaches or asthma
- Help a client recognize and release tension before it becomes a problem
- Ease and deepen breathing
- Improve appetite and digestion
- Help relieve constipation

In addition, current research is showing that regular massage therapy can boost the immune system and positively influence the course of many minor diseases.

Massage can have profound, positive effects on one's mental and emotional state; this is especially true for those who are older adults. Massage provides physical and mental stimulation from an "outside" person not involved in routine care. This can relieve boredom for the mentally alert and help the disoriented reconnect with the present time and place.

As an individual relaxes, daily frustrations can seem less overwhelming. A person who feels better after a massage may be more inclined to be physically active or to socialize with others.

Massage can calm the anxious or agitated person who feels frightened, depressed or out of control. The person feels less lonely, and is reassured that he or she is still important, and that someone cares.
**Giving a Geriatric Massage:** Massage therapy can be given in almost any setting including home, hospital or care facility. The person receiving the massage can be in bed or seated upright in a chair or wheelchair, and may remain fully clothed.

A massage session can last from 10 to 30 minutes or longer depending on the person's physical condition, mental and emotional state, and tolerance for touch. Sessions can vary considerably to meet individual needs and preferences, from a simple hand or foot massage to a complete body massage. Sometimes focused attention will produce the greatest benefit. This can be as simple as actively listening to a person and maintaining supportive physical contact such as gentle pressure to the hand or shoulder.

The frequency of sessions should be based on individual needs, availability of the massage therapist, and financial consideration. Sessions can range from twice a week to monthly. Physical benefits tend to increase with regular and frequent sessions. An older adult or ill person may also consider reflexology as an alternative to massage therapy.

There are some conditions for which massage should be avoided completely. Examples of conditions requiring different degrees of caution are severe osteoporosis, arthritis in the inflamed stage, or thrombophlebitis (vein inflammation related to a blood clot); more precautions are mentioned below.

It is important that you are given a thorough health history before each massage session. Changes in an individual's physical condition and medications, as well as changes in the person's mental or emotional state can happen on a daily basis. In some cases, the massage therapist may want to consult with an individual's physician or other health care team member before proceeding.

**Precautions:** Geriatric massage is not to be used as a replacement for exercise programs or for medical treatment. According to The Day-Break Geriatric Massage Institute, it should not be given to older adults patients with the following conditions:

**Calf pain with heat:** This can be phlebitis, an inflammation of a vein, sometimes a blood clot. Sometimes you can see; a red line on the calf and the area will be hot to the touch. Very painful. Don't massage. (Definite contraindication)

**Thrombosis:** A blood clot. Don't massage unless you have the doctor's ok and the client is on blood thinners.

**Aneurism:** A circumscribed sac-like bulging or ballooning of a blood vessel, almost always an artery. They are usually found in the aorta, brain or stomach, but can be anywhere. If it bursts, the person could die. Aneurisms are usually due to a congenital defect or weakened wall of the vessel. Abdominal aneurysm - can tell by a strong pulsing in lower abdomen - stay away. GET A DOCTOR'S PERMISSION!!
Don’t massage:

- Open sores (work around area to promote healing)
- Undiagnosed rashes
- Very high fever
- Extremely high blood pressure (unusual for client)
- Sore and enlarged lymph nodes (when a lymph node is enlarged, it is trying to do its' job of fighting an infection - don't disturb the process)
- The site of an injury, surgery or injection
- Fractured ribs
- Burn wounds
- Skin ulcers
- Eczema (when it is in its raised, red rash phase don't massage then. If it is just dry skin, it is ok to massage).

Bedridden clients: Avoid deep work on legs of patients who have been bedridden for more than 3 days because of possible dislodging of blood clots.

Heart problems: Don't use prone position. Limit massage to 20-30 minutes max. Get doctors ok. Longer massage is just too much for the system. (Caution)

Pain spots: Gentle; petrissage; starting at the border away from the pain and moving up to the pain spot. Do this above pain spot and below the pain spot. In doing this you address the individual pain receptors and calm them down. (Caution)

Painful joints: Ice cube therapy. Ice for 2-3 minutes around the pain area then gentle massage for 2-3 minutes. Repeat. Ice reduces the swelling, and massage loosens the joints. Ice pushes the blood flow away then it comes rushing back in. Ice, plays tag with blood. (Caution)

No deep tissue on elderly: Their skin is thinner and can bruise easier and tear more easily. (Caution)

Other Conditions to be Aware of when working with Older Adults:

- certain kinds of cancer
- recent surgery
- varicose veins
- severe acute pain
- a history of blood clots (The blood clots may become dislodged and travel to the lungs as a result of massage.)
- drug treatment with blood thinners (These medications increase the risk of bleeding under the skin.)
GMT is made up of the following characteristics:

- Short sessions. A geriatric massage session usually lasts no longer than 30 minutes, longer sessions may be too much for an older person.

- Use of gentle hand motions. These motions are comfortable and soothing to the body. They are designed to improve blood circulation and heart function, prevent diabetic complications, relieve muscle tension, and relax the body and the mind.

- Passive movement and gentle stretching of shoulders, legs and feet to improve joint mobility and flexibility.

- Gentle massage of the hands and feet (if the joints are not inflamed) to prevent stiffness and relieve pain.

- Occasional use of stronger movements such as friction and pressure strokes. These are sometimes used to massage such areas as the shoulders to improve flexibility.

Geriatric Massage Therapy- It is for all of us:

The sense of touch is the first sense to develop in a fetus and the last sense to leave us when we die. People are in need of nurturing touch throughout their lives and some are deprived of it.

Take interest in the changes to your body as you grow older. It is so easy to forget that physically our bodies may change over time but we, the souls who live in them, are the same. We tend to forget that an older adult needs as much closeness, body contact and hugs as when they were young. This is where Geriatric Massage Therapy can help.

Geriatric Massage alone can do miracles, but - as Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) said: “Only with God’s will medicine may help and healing occur. Nevertheless, massage can promote health and well-being throughout life.”

Hopefully, when the time comes for us to receive the care that Geriatric Massage offers, there will be many loving hands to care for us. So, let us start today by offering all the “Minnies” out there our loving attention and Geriatric Massage.
Questions that may be asked by geriatric clients about to receive massage:

What will happen during the massage?

Some geriatric clients have never experienced massage and may not know what to expect during the massage. For this reason, it is important to make sure they are as comfortable as possible and that every detail is explained to them prior to starting the massage.

Traditionally most massages are performed with the client unclothed; however, they must decide what amount of clothing they prefer to wear for their own comfort. If they want to keep their clothes on, they can and will still receive benefit from the massage.

Any therapist should leave the room while the patient undresses. Upon your return, make sure they are relaxed on the table and covered with a clean sheet and also a blanket. Throughout the session, they will be properly draped and covered. Only the area being worked will be uncovered. A light oil will be used to permit their muscles to be worked on without causing excessive friction to the skin.

Should I have a physician’s approval?

In most cases of Geriatric Massage the answer is yes. If the client has a specific health condition, it is the client’s responsibility to receive permission from their physician to proceed with massage. In certain cases you may want to speak directly to their physician. This is merely a precaution to protect the client and the therapist. As with any population, certain conditions are "contraindicated" for massage and geriatric clients are more prone to these conditions.
Is a Half-hour Really Enough?
(submitted by Sharon Puszko, PhD, CMT)

This is a frequently asked question. In replying I always stress the fact that the one and even two-hour massage is largely an American invention which came into being during the sixties. I routinely give the following three reasons:

Massage has a profound effect on the heart and on the sensory nervous system in many of the elderly. A 60 minute massage can have a negative effect by overloading the nervous system, the heart, and possibly the kidneys. The kidneys are already compromised due to the loss of a considerable number of glomeruli. So the increased blood flow during a massage can be detrimental.

A second reason is that if you want to do a good job with your client, you must be very attentive. Every move should be purposeful and you should not let your mind wander. Since only chess champions and concert pianists are able to concentrate for longer than a half-hour, a shorter massage will be more focused than a one-hour massage. Reason number three is of a practical nature. It is easier to find people that can afford a weekly half-hour massage than a two-hour massage. You will find half hour massages easier to schedule at senior centers and nursing homes. If you work with a regular one-hour client who has a specific problem that would show more progress with two weekly treatments, try changing to two half-hour massages.

The difficulty is changing the concept of what massage is about. It is up to the therapist to make the mental transition from recreational massage. It is not necessary to leave no square of skin untouched, as long as you work the areas that really need the attention. The first thing to consider is positioning. The most comfortable position for the elderly client is face up, with the exception of people with kyphosis. It also is the least time consuming position. Almost the whole body can be worked in the supine position: feet, legs, hips, lumbar area, chest, shoulders, neck and arms. Work on the back can be done by reaching under the client's back with bent fingers, approaching from either the head of the table or from the side. By not having to turn the client over, you save up to 5 minutes. If need be, the client could easily be put in the side lying position.

Now consider the structure of the massage. Begin with a 5 minute introduction, an unhurried application of calming strokes, some deep breathes, gentle rocking, etc. to set the scene. Then proceed to the bulk of the work, be it feet and legs, or shoulders and neck. Again do the unhurried. Do not carry on a conversation as it takes away from the quality of your work. It is your concentration that is the most important factor in your treatment because it channels your energy into your client's body. A good therapy-type massage has some hypnotic quality that the massaged body picks up. Leave about 5 minutes for a closing. A gradual disengagement will allow the client to rejoin the world, feeling great, with the pain and discomfort gone, and refreshed.
Therapists interested in geriatric massage training may contact:

The Day Break Geriatric Massage Project at www.daybreak-massage.com, or contact Sharon Puszko directly via e-mail at spuszko@juno.com or (317)722-9896.

Another geriatric-massage specialist is Cheryl Chapman, R.N., H.N.C. (Holistic Nurse Certified). She teaches an eight-hour geriatric massage workshop. For more information about Cheryl Chapman's workshops, e-mail her at Touch2RN@aol.com, or call (973) 912-9060.