Common Skin Disorders
COMMON SKIN DISORDERS

Disorders of the skin fall into two main categories, Infectious/Contagious and Non-infectious/Non-contagious. Infectious disorders are capable of being transmitted to others and are usually caused by a pathogen (disease causing agent). Some examples are viruses, fungi, bacteria or parasites.

As massage therapists we see people’s skin in places they may not. We are in a position to notice lesions or moles they may not be aware of. Many skin conditions contraindicate massage because they may be contagious. A cardinal rule for massage is that if the skin is not intact it is an open invitation to infection so we should avoid that area.

Massage is contraindicated in places where there is inflammation – pain, heat, redness and swelling are present. Massage is also contraindicated if there is a fever.

INFECTIONOUS SKIN CONDITIONS /CONTAGEOUS

A. Bacterial Infections

❖ Impetigo

- Impetigo is a bacterial infection of the skin caused by staphylococcus or streptococcus. Highly contagious.
- A rash with fluid-filled blisters and honey-colored crusts characterizes impetigo. It usually begins somewhere on the face around the mouth or nose, but can appear anywhere on the body.
- No massage.
- TREATMENT: rub soap into affected area three times a day until scab comes off. Application of topical antibiotic.
Abscess or Boil

- A boil is a **bacterial infection**, caused by **staph**, of hair follicles and their sebaceous glands.
- A cluster of boils connected by channels under the skin is a carbuncle.
- It is characterized by a swollen, painful area on the skin like an overgrown pimple.
- Pushing, squeezing or kneading it can be very painful and could cause the boil to rupture inside the tissue spreading a systemic infection.
- **Highly contagious and locally contraindicated** – screen for systemic infection – fever, etc.
- Massage may be performed if no signs of systemic infection, but not on or near the lesion.
- TREATMENT: Apply a hot wash cloth for 15 minutes then re-soak the cloth in hot water and repeat. May need to be drained by a doctor.

Lyme Disease

- Lyme disease is caused by **bacteria transmitted** by the bite of a **deer-tick** or **Western black-legged ticks**.
- Flu-like symptoms occur which may or may not be accompanied by a rash.
- The immune response to the bacteria causes inflammation of large joints, along with neurologic and cardiovascular symptoms.
- The hallmark early symptom of Lyme disease is a circular “bull’s eye” rash at the site of the bite.
- Massage contraindicated in the acute stages.
- TREATMENT: Antibiotics for long periods of time.

Pathology book on page 89 included in musculoskeletal conditions but mentioned here because of the rash.

**B. Viral Skin Infections**

- **Cold sores/Fever Blisters**
  - Cold sores are clusters of fluid-filled vesicles that occur on the lips or oral membranes or genitals.
  - Herpes Simplex I virus causes cold sores around the mouth or nose. Herpes Simplex II creates them on the genitals, thighs or buttocks. Affected area can be itchy and painful.
  - **Highly contagious.** Usually active when the immune system is compromised.
  - Stress, a fever, a systemic infection, a sunburn may be factors in triggering an episode.
  - Massage is locally contraindicated.
  - TREATMENT: Drying agents like corn starch may help.

- **Shingles**
  - Shingles or Herpes Zoster is a viral infection of sensory neurons from the same virus that causes chicken pox.
  - Shingles creates rashes and extremely painful blisters, unilaterally along the affected dermatomes.
- The trunk or buttocks are the most common areas affected – occasionally the face – trigeminal nerve.
- **Highly contagious. Pain can linger for years.**
- **Massage is contraindicated in severe cases and locally contraindicated in mild outbreaks.**
- **TREATMENT:** Acyclovir, an anti-viral medicine may be successful. Beyond that, the use of soothing lotion or steroids may help.

**Warts**

- Warts are **small, benign skin tumors** (neoplasms) that are caused by a **viral infection that stimulates excessive growth of epithelial cells.**
- Typical warts look like hard, cauliflower shaped growths. They usually occur on the hands. Teenagers seem especially prone to them.
- Scratching can spread them. Plantar warts can be painful and grow inward, on the plantar surface of the foot.
- **Massage is locally contraindicated. The virus is contained in the blood and shedding skin cells, and it is possible to get warts from another person.**
- **TREATMENT:** Liquid nitrogen to freeze the warts off works best.

**C. Fungal Infections**

- **All fungal infections are contagious.** Fungus thrives in warm, dark, moist areas. Most of the time they have a foul, yeasty smell to them.
- **Fungal infections of the skin are also called mycosis. The lesions the infections create are called TINEA.**
- **Tinea infections vary considerable depending on where they appear.** Some of the common ones are addressed below.

**Ring Worm**
- Tinea corporis or body ringworm is relatively common and very contagious fungal infection.
- It is characterized by itching and small, scaly, ringed patches.
- It can be spread by scratching and can be passed on by pets or contaminated objects.

- Athletics foot (tinea pedis) is a fungal infection of the feet and hands characterized by itching, burning, cracks in the skin, scaling and tiny blisters.

- Nail fungus and jock itch are also fungal infections –tinea.

- Massage is contraindicated in every phase of fungal infections. If it is a small infestation with just one or two lesions, it can be considered a local caution. Therapist must do a 10% bleach rinse afterwards.
- TREATMENT: External applications of fungicide are normal, but oral meds. For stubborn or hard to reach infections. Treatment for these can be very frustrating especially when fungus is growing under toenails or fingernails.
Candida

- Candidiasis, or yeast infections, occur when a normally present yeast-like fungus gets out of balance with other local flora.
- It is characterized by severe itching around the vagina, anus, body folds or crotch areas.
- Massage is indicated in a mild or chronic low-grade case to help the person get rid of the yeast-related toxins.

D. Parasitic Skin Infections

- Lice - lice and mites are tiny animals that drink blood. They are highly contagious and spread through close contact with skin or infested sheets or clothing.

Three Types of Lice

- Head lice - transmitted by combs, hats, and pillows. They live in hair and actually prefer clean hair to dirty hair. Their saliva is irritating and causes itching that can open the skin and lead to a secondary infection.

- Pubic lice - Crabs – transmitted from person to person by sexual contact, bed and massage linens. Prefer pubic hair but may also be found under the arms, eyelashes and eyebrows.

- Body lice - can spread serious infections, associated with poor hygiene, closely crowded living conditions.
- **Never massage someone with lice.** If you find out after the massage has taken place, take all precautionary measures with the room, linens, etc.
- **TREATMENT:** Repeated applications of pesticidal shampoo to kill adults and eggs is the first step. Some types of lice are becoming resistant to the standard pesticides, so not it is recommended that applications of the medicine be followed by systematically combing every section of hair with a very fine-toothed comb (nit picking). You can also smother the lice with petroleum jelly or mayonnaise, but this is a less effective treatment than the shampoos. It is also very important to wash bedding, towels, and clothing, as well as thoroughly cleaning hats, hairbrushes, combs, and anything else that has come in contact with the head. Wash these items at 130 degrees and dry on high heat for at least 20 minutes.

❖ **Scabies**

- Scabies is caused by a mite that lives in burrows it makes in the skin. It creates itchy lesions in the skin.
- Scabies is spread through close personal contact or through contact with something someone else has worn or lain on – like massage sheets.
- **Burrow that look like reddish or grayish lines might be visible.** Scabies favor the groin, the axilla, elbows, the palms of the hands and between fingers.
- Massage is contraindicated here. If you find out after the massage that some has scabies, consider the sheets infected. Isolate them from other sheets and wash them using extra bleach. See a doctor to treat yourself immediately. Symptoms may not present for up to four weeks and if you continue to massage others, they too will become infested. This is highly contagious.
- As with any parasitic infestation, treat this by bathing with a pesticidal soap. All bedding, towels, etc. must also be washed daily.

❖ **Ticks**

- Ticks are **insects that feed on blood.**
- They **burrow in the skin and carry diseases like typhus and lyme disease.**
- They are easy to see.
- Should you observe a tick on a client, discontinue the massage and refer this person to their doctor or urgent care for the removal of the tick.
ALLERGIC SKIN CONDITIONS/NON-CONTAGIOUS

❖ Hives

- Hives are red, itchy bumps or wheals that usually result from an allergic reaction to certain foods, drugs or pollens.
- They generally subside in a few hours.
- Hives systemically contraindicate massage in the acute phase, and locally contraindicate it in the subacute. If a client has a history of this, it is wise to use extra precautions being sure the lotion or oil will not initiate an attack.
- TREATMENT: Hives are annoying, but seldom serious. If treatment is required, it will be an antihistamine.

❖ Eczema - Dermatitis is an umbrella term for skin inflammation.

- Eczema is an atopic dermatitis – a condition connected to hypersensitivity reactions in the skin.
- It is a rash usually brought about by an allergic reaction.
- It generally appears as very dry and flaky skin or blistered, weepy skin.
- It is noninfectious and non-contagious.
- **Seborrheic eczema is characterized by hyperactivity of sebaceous glands and patches of red, scaling and itching skin.** It may occur at the corners of the mouth, in hairy area or in skin exposed to irritants.
- Massage depends on the causes and severity of the client’s dermatitis. The therapist must dialog with the client to see what type of dermatitis they have. If it is eczema and there is no danger of infection setting in, massage is appropriate.
- **TREATMENT:** It is important to keep the skin hydrated and usually this person will use a corticosteroid cream which is an anti-inflammatory.

❖ **Allergic Reactions**

- Allergic reactions **usually manifest as itchy welts all over the body.**
- These reactions are **capable of progressing to anaphylaxis where blood pressure will drop dramatically and the throat may swell so that breathing becomes impossible.**
- **Anaphylactic reactions are very serious and require immediate emergency medical attention.** Allergic people may carry an Epipen so they can have an injection of epinephrine, which will help reverse the reaction.

**METABOLIC SKIN CONDITIONS/NON-CONTAGIOUS**

❖ **Acne**

- Acne is a chronic skin disorder characterized by **plugged hair follicles that often form pimples due to infection by certain bacteria.**
- Usually occurs on the face, back and shoulders.
- **Acne often appears at puberty, when reproductive hormones stimulate increased sebum secretion.**
- When massaging, avoid any open lesions or weeping sores. Use a light oil such as Jojoba or Biotone’s Light Nutrinatural oil.
- **TREATMENT:** Never use soap, alcohol or drying agents on acne. Use a light oil so the skin gets the message to slow down oil production. Cleanse with agents designed to neutralize glandular output of oils. Avance products work best for this condition and are carried in the AAIMT store.
❖ **Seborrheic Keratosis**

- Seborrheic keratosis are **skin lesions that are very common in older people.**
- They are **benign growths on the skin that have a waxy, pasted on appearance.** They may develop a warty appearance when they have been present for a long time.
- **They occur on sun exposed areas and are not dangerous.** When they are dark they may look like malignant melanoma but they are completely benign.
- **Massage is completely safe.**
- **TREATMENT:** If one were to have these removed, it is done by freezing them off using liquid nitrogen.

❖ **Psoriasis**

- Psoriasis is a **chronic, non-contagious dermatitis characterized by reddish, raised patches of skin that are covered with whitish scales. It might be itchy or sore.**
- It occurs most often on the scalp, elbows, knees, buttocks and lumbar areas.
- The **normal process of skin cell production has gone awry.** Skin cells are being replaced every four days instead of every 28 days or so. This causes the new skin cells to be pushed up before the old ones have had a chance to slough off.
- Emotional stress or poor health may trigger it. It can come and go.
- It the **acute stage massage is locally contraindicated** because the extra stimulation and circulation massage provides may make the situation worse. In subacute stages, massage is fine as long as the skin is intact.
- This is very difficult to treat. No single treatment is effective for a majority of people. Often the medications have serious side effects and people build up resistance to them. There are systemic medications, topical medications and Phototherapy using limited exposure to sunshine.

**NEOPLASTIC SKIN CONDITIONS/NON-CONTAGIOUS**

Neoplastic disorders are **abnormal tissue formation that serves no function.** There are **three categories:** benign, pre-cancerous and malignant.
A. Benign: non-contagious

❖ Moles

- Moles are slow growing skin tumors that are usually brown or black in color. They can be raised or flat and may have hairs growing out of them. They come in a variety of shades of brown, depending on the amount of melanin.
- They can appear anywhere on the skin, alone or in groups. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes.
- Most moles appear on the body before the age of 20. The life cycle of the average mole is 50 years. They may slowly disappear, seeming to fade or may become raised so far from the skin that they develop a stalk and then fall off.
- Certain types of moles have been determined to have a higher than average risk of becoming cancerous. Some may develop into malignant melanoma. Excessive sun exposure may increase the risk.
- Moles that appear at birth are more likely to develop into melanoma. If they are more than 8 inches in diameter the risk is greatest.
- Moles considered atypical are larger than average (average being smaller than a pencil eraser) and irregular in shape. They will have uneven color with dark brown centers and lighter, uneven edges.
- Someone with atypical moles may have a greater than average chance of developing malignant melanoma.

❖ ABC’S of Moles

A – Asymmetrical – the halves look different
B – Borders are irregular, occasionally indistinct and blended with nearby skin.
C – Color is mottled and several colors may be mixed together.
D – Diameter is greater than 6 mm
E – Elevated May be elevated
F – Fast growing

As massage therapists we watch out for these signs on our clients.

- Massage is fine over moles.
- TREATMENT: Some doctors suggest removing larger moles as a precaution.
- **Age Spots**
  Age spots are **small grayish or brownish spots**. Also known as liver spots and **appear as part of the aging process**. They are simply an **accumulation of melanin**. Not dangerous.
  - Massage is fine over age spots.
  - TREATMENT: Unnecessary.

- **Skin Tags**
  A skin tag is a **small, soft, flesh-colored or pigmented benign growth found on the neck or in the axillary or groin region**.
  - Massage is fine over skin tags.
  - TREATMENT: If troublesome, these are cut off at a doctor’s office.

- **Lipoma**
  - A lipoma is a **benign tumor formed from mature fat cells**. The tumor appears as a **soft, movable, subcutaneous nodule typically found on the trunk, forearms or neck**.
  - Massage is perfectly OK over lipomas.
  - TREATMENT: The only reason to have them removed is for vanity or if they interfere with ROM. May have seen them on dogs.

### B. Malignant: non-contagious

- **Skin Cancer**
  - Cancer results from excessive cell division that does not respond to normal controls and results in the growth of tumors.
  - **Cancers of the skin are usually carcinomas** (basal cell carcinomas or squamous cell carcinoma) **involving epidermal cells**.
  - **Less prevalent are melanomas, cancers of melanocytes**.
  - Melanomas are especially dangerous because they tend to grow and metastasize rapidly. Excessive exposure to sunlight is the primary cause of skin cancer.
  - The best defense against skin cancer is sun avoidance. The surest way to cure the condition is early detection.
  - There are **precancerous skin conditions and the most common type is Actinic Keratosis**.
  - Small scaly spots most commonly found on the face and back of the hands of fair-skinned people who have had significant sun exposure. If left untreated, some may become skin cancer, requiring significant treatment. It is easiest to **treat** in the early stages by **freezing them off**.
Three Forms of Skin Cancer

1. Basal cell carcinoma

- Most common type 75-90% of all skin cancer.
- It is a slow growing, non-metastasizing tumor of epithelial cells in the stratum basale.
- Tumor usually appears as a small fleshy bump or nodule on the head, neck and hands.
- Most common on people with fair complexions, light hair, light eyes and that don’t tan easily.
- Tumors don’t grow quickly, taking months or years to reach a diameter of ½ inch.
- If untreated, will begin to bleed, crust over and repeat the cycle.
- Rarely metastasizes, but can extend below the skin to bone and cause considerable damage.
- Massage is locally contraindicated.
- TREATMENT: Excised by cutting out with a knife or laser.

2. Squamous Cell Carcinoma
- Second most common skin cancer found in Caucasians.
- It is a malignancy of keratinocytes in the epidermis.
- Tumors may appear as nodules or as red, scaly patches.
- Typically found on the rim of the ear, the face, the lips and mouth. Can occur inside the mouth due to pipe smoking or chewing tobacco.
- Rarely found in dark-skinned people
- Significantly more dangerous than BCC. It can metastasize through the lymph system and tumors can infiltrate deeper tissues more quickly.
- It is estimated that there are 2,300 American deaths from non-melanoma skin cancers every year.
- The cure rate for BCC and SCC is 95\% when properly treated. Treat by freezing or removing.
- Do not massage as it may spread through the lymph.
- TREATMENT: Usually are frozen off with liquid nitrogen or excised.

3. Malignant Melanoma
- The most dangerous of all skin cancers
- Develops on the skin of 32,000 Americans annually, killing about 6,800 of them
- Melanoma is almost always curable in its early stages.
- Melanoma often starts from a pre-existing mole that undergoes changes. Doesn’t always start from a mole and doesn’t always begin in areas exposed to the sun.
- Melanoma begins in melanocytes. Melanoma cells usually continue to produce melanin, which accounts for the cancers appearing in mixed shades of tan, brown and black.
- Melanomas do metastasize making it essential to get early treatment.
- Melanomas may suddenly appear without warning but is may also begin in or near a mole or other dark spot on the skin.
- Excessive exposure to sun, as with other skin cancers, is accepted as a cause of melanoma, especially among light-skinned people.
- Heredity may play a part and also atypical moles, which may run in families, can serve as markers identifying the person as being high risk.
- Large moles that develop after adolescence are highly suspect. Moles that are subject to a lot of irritation are at especially high risk of becoming cancerous.
- Dark or black skin is not a guarantee against developing melanoma. Black people may develop this cancer on their palms, soles, under nails or in the mouth.
- No massage – spreads through the lymph and is fast growing and aggressive.
- This takes aggressive treatment and possibly hospitalization.
MISCELLANEOUS SKIN CONDITIONS/NON-CONTAGIOUS

❖ Corns and Calluses
- Corns and Calluses are thickened areas of skin that result from chronic pressure.
- Calluses are large and often occur on the palms of the hands at the metacarpal joints and on the balls of the feet.
- Corns are smaller and usually occur on the upper surface of the toes – often as a result of improperly fitted shoes.
- Ok to massage within comfort of the client.
- TREATMENT: Using a foot file helps smooth out the skin.

❖ Bedsores
- Decubitus ulcers
- Stems from chronic inadequate blood flow to the skin that stretches over bony or otherwise prominent areas.
- Almost always occurs in an area that has been in constant contact with a surface, usually a bed, but sometimes a cast or a splint.
- Massage is contraindicated.
- TREATMENT: The best cure is a folk remedy – sugar poured directly into the wound will dry and begin the healing process. The health care industry will use topical antibiotics and dressings and even go so far as to use plastic surgery.

❖ Burns
- Burns are damage to the skin caused by heat, chemicals or radiation.
- Classified according to the degree of damage.
- 1st degree burn is damage to the epidermal layer. Skin functions are unaffected.
- 2nd degree burns damages deeper layers of the epidermis and the outer portion of the dermis. Blisters form within the epidermis and generally there is no infection.
- 3rd degree burns destroys the epidermis, dermis, glands, hair follicles and nerve endings. Normal skin functions are lost. Control of fluid loss and bacterial infection are critical. Skin grafting is often necessary and scarring occurs usually.

Interactions with other body systems see course pack.
ABSORPTION THROUGH THE SKIN

Substances that are lipid-soluble can penetrate the epidermis, although rather slowly. When a substance reaches the dermis it is absorbed into the circulation.

Drugs can be administered via the skin producing slow and prolonged action over several days. Nicotine patches, Estrogen patches are examples.

Corticosteroids applied topically to treat chronic inflammation can be absorbed though the skin and produce symptoms of corticosteroid excess or Cushing’s syndrome, if used over a prolonged period of time.