



THE MORE YOU KNOW

LEARNING HOW TO
WORK SMARTER, NOT
HARDER, IS GOOD FOR
BOTH YOU AND YOUR
CLIENTS.

BY SHARI AUTH

You love massage therapy, but you also know it's both physically and emotionally demanding. **The risk of burnout or injury is very real, and so you need to make sure you're taking care of yourself, and your body.** One way to ensure you can remain a practicing massage therapist until you decide you want to stop is learning different ways to massage your clients, especially those who require deep work.

Most massage therapists are limited by the amount of energy they have, not the amount of time. Full-time massage therapists typically see between 20 to 30 clients a week, less than the traditional 40-hour week. Because massage therapists are limited by the amount of energy they have, it's crucial they learn to be efficient in their work. Learning to deliver therapeutic results to your client without taxing your body is key.

If you equate being a massage therapist with being big and strong, chances are you are pushing your way through your job and are spending a lot more energy than you need to. Massage, even deep massage, doesn't take great strength. Rather, it takes finesse. Here are a few suggestions to take some of the work out of your massage routine.

LEAN ON ME

Rather than pushing your way through your client's body, simply drop your body weight onto your client, using your weight instead of muscular force to engage the tissue. Using muscular force, or pushing into the tissue, is exhausting and runs the risk of working too deep. Instead, just drop your body weight onto the tissue and you'll naturally sink to the first layer of tight tissue. As that layer releases, you'll sink to the next layer of tight tissue. Patiently work layer by layer to create a massage experience that is deep without being painful for your client or strenuous for you.

BIG JOBS REQUIRE BIG TOOLS

There's a saying that "If the only tool in your toolbox is a hammer everything looks like a nail." You need a big box of massage tools to manage the plethora of issues your clients come to you to help with.

Learning to massage with your forearms, for example, has a number of benefits. First off, because your forearms are more durable than your hands, fingers or thumbs, you can work longer with less wear and tear on the more fragile joints of your hands. And finding modalities that help reduce stress on your hands and fingers can mean a longer and more productive career.

Consider reserving your hands for massaging delicate

areas, such as your client's head, face, fingers and toes. You may find that the more you use your forearms during massage, the more sensitive they become, offering you a broader surface area of contact. And, increasing the surface area you work means you can address a wider variety of issues your clients might be struggling with in less time.

In addition, forearms are great for leaning into the tissue because they offer a sturdy base of support for your body weight, while also offering smooth and comfortable contact for the client.

HOW LOW DO YOU GO?

When you use your body weight to achieve deeper work with your clients, you might find you need to adjust the height of your table. Before starting a session, make sure your table is low enough to drop your body weight onto your client. If you have a large or muscular client that wants deep work, lower your table an extra notch. Ensuring your own comfort is a large part of staying health throughout your massage career.

RELAX!

Could you be doing less and getting the same results? Most of us are using more energy than we need to while massaging our clients. Check in with your breath and body while massaging. Consciously deepen your breath while you're working and relax all the muscles that you don't really need to perform massage. By relaxing, you'll not only save energy, you will also be more effective.

Remember, too, that the same way we are sensing our clients, they are sensing us. The more relaxed you are, the more relaxed your clients will be. If you finish a massage more tense than when you started, you aren't doing yourself or your clients any good.

FEELING STRETCHED

Try placing a tight muscle in a position that stretches the muscle before massaging it. Doing so will intensify the massage work you do on the muscle without intensifying your workload. Likewise, beware of the client that wants you to pound away on a tight spot. Tight spots



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are usually a symptom and not a source of pain. Take time to find the source of the pain. The source of pain is usually quite sensitive, so you won't need to use a lot of pressure to release it. And when it does release, so might the hot spot your client is complaining about.

CLIENT PARTICIPATION

For most people, breathing isn't something they pay close attention to. Encourage your clients to breathe, especially if you are massaging an area that is tight. For example, ask if they'll breathe into an area you are massaging. This increases circulation to that area and also relaxes your client. Use their breath as a helpful and effortless tool for deeper relaxation of both mind and body.

BODY MECHANICS

Practice good body mechanics. Use your legs more than your arms. Stand in a wide stance while massaging. By standing in a wide stance you will naturally activate through the legs. As you move across your client's body, move your entire body with each massage stroke. This will ensure that you are using your body weight and not muscular force. Keep your back straight, navel slightly in toward your spine (this engages your core muscles and keeps you from overarching), chest open and shoulders relaxed.

Massage therapy is a physical profession, and there's no getting around that. However, finding ways to work more efficiently without sacrificing the results you achieve can go a long way in keeping you in the profession you love. ■