

Massage History

General History

In human beings, massage probably began when cave dwellers rubbed their aches and pains. Massage is one of the most natural and instinctive means of relieving pain and discomfort. When a person has sore, aching muscles, abdominal pains or a bruise or a wound, the first impulse is to rub or touch the area of the body to obtain relief.

Therapeutic massage has strong roots in Chinese folk medicine but has many aspects in common with other healing traditions such as Indian herbal medicine and Persian medicine. It is thought that the art of massage was first written about in 2000 BC and it has been written about extensively in books since 500 BC. Egyptian, Persian and Japanese historical medical literature make reference to massage throughout.

Massage was first practiced by the Chinese who believed it should be done at the start of the day before rising. The word *massage* is derived from the arabic verb 'masah' meaning 'to rub'

Ancient Times

Most ancient cultures practiced some form of healing touch. Often it was a ceremonial leader such as a shaman, healer or priest that was selected to perform the healing rites. The methods often used herbs, oils and primitive forms of hydrotherapy.

In China, massage has been known by two names: *Anmo Amma* (press-rub) and *Tui-na* (push-pull). These Chinese methods were performed by kneading or rubbing down the entire body with the hands and using gentle pressure and traction on all the joints.

The Sui Dynasty in China (AD 589-617) had already well established the knowledge of massage and its applications. The Japanese came to know massage through writings of the Chinese and massage has been a part of life in India for almost 3000 years.

The ancient Egyptians left artwork showing foot massage and Greek athletes taking place in the Olympics underwent friction treatments, anointing and rubbing with sand. The use of touch for healing is recorded in the writing of the Hebrew and Christian traditions (laying on of hands). The ancient Mayans, Incas and other native people of the

America continent also used methods of joint manipulation and massage.

Hippocrates of Cos (460-377 BC) was the first physician in Greek medicine to describe specifically the medical benefits of anointing and massage. He called his art anatripsis, which means to rub up.

Massage came to the Romans from the Greeks. Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) had himself 'pinched all over' daily to relieve his neuralgia and prevent epileptic attacks. Romans believed in a healthy mind in a healthy body. They gave athletes pre- and post-exercise massages.

Middle Ages

Massage developed differently in the East and West. The East continued the Greco-Roman traditions while massage was kept alive in the West by common people. In this form, massage was an important part of the healing tradition of the Slavs, Finns and Swedes. Practitioners of folk medicine often were persecuted with the church claiming that the practitioner's healing powers came from the devil. One of the founders of modern surgery, Ambrose Pare' (1517-1590) began massage again to relieve joint stiffness and wound healing after surgery.

The 19th Century

Per Henrik Ling (1776-1839) is credited with developing Swedish massage, but he did not invent it. He learned it from others and through persistent experimentation, put the information together in a workable form. He proposed an integrated program for the treatment of disease using active and passive movements and massage. He came to London in 1838 to teach Swedish remedial massage.

In his system, Ling divided movements into active, duplicated and passive forms. Active movements are performed by the person's own effort (exercise). Duplicated movements are performed by the person with the co-operation of a therapist with active participation by both parties (resistance exercise). Passive movements are performed for the person by the therapist (range of motion and stretching).

The 20th Century

Massage was not practised at all during Victorian times. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) experimented with massage in the treatment of hysteria, a form of mental illness in his time. This condition is characterised by a paralysis that has no physiological basis. During the Crimean war, massage was used to help the injured.

In the early 1900s, Dr Randolph Stone, an American physician, devised polarity therapy. By studying many body systems, both ancient and modern, including acupuncture, hatha yoga, osteopathy, chiropractic techniques and reflexology, he concluded that 'magnetic fields' regulated and directed the physiological systems of the body.

In 1916 Dr James Mennell divided the effects of massage into two categories: mechanical actions and reflex actions. Mennell showed that massage exerts a mechanical effect in four ways:

- By aiding venous return of blood to the heart
- By promoting lymph movement out of tissues
- By stretching the connective tissue (e.g. tendons, scar tissue)
- By mechanical stimulation of the stomach, small intestine and colon.

Mennell also maintained that certain forms of tactile stimulation, such as stroking and light touch, stimulated reflex arcs causing muscles to relax or contract according to the type of stroke.

The Future of Massage

The role of massage and related bodywork methods is expanding at an accelerated pace. Massage now has enough validation to justify its use by the public as well as health care professional. An explosion of information and awareness has occurred.

The massage profession is changing. It is becoming more sophisticated, requiring education not only in technical skills development but also in pathology, medications, record keeping, communication skills and professional ethics.

As the world becomes a global community, the ever growing exchange of information will enrich the knowledge base of therapeutic massage. Exploration of ancient healing methods will reveal that wisdom and scientific validity of a body/mind/spirit approach to well-being.