



# Oncology Massage Requires Specialized Basic Training

## Summary

A massage therapist needs specialized basic training to know whether and how to adjust standard massage for the safety of anyone affected by cancer.

## Introduction

Oncology massage is now a clearly defined field that is found in major cancer centers, hospitals, clinics, spas, and private practices. Clinical research and anecdotal evidence point to significant benefits for people in treatment, recovery, survivorship, palliative, and end of life care.

Oncology massage is a body of knowledge and skill based on a fundamental understanding of the ways cancer and cancer treatment affect the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of a person. With this understanding a therapist can clinically assess massage adjustments for anyone who has ever received a cancer diagnosis or treatment.

## Specialized Basic Training

The basic foundation for practicing oncology massage includes knowledge and skills best acquired by:

1. Successful completion of a 500-hour state-recognized massage therapy training program. This imparts the minimum knowledge and skills established by the massage profession for independent private practice.
2. A minimum of one year (400+ hours) in general massage practice. This experience extends and sharpens observational, intake, tactile, and interpersonal skills in preparation for specialty
3. Successful completion of an S4OM recognized foundational oncology massage therapy

## Non-Standard Training

A rare therapist may acquire the necessary knowledge and skills through independent study and experience. Before working with anyone who has ever been diagnosed with cancer, the therapist should understand:

- The many effects of the disease of cancer
- The early, long term and late side effects of surgery, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, and
- Appropriate selection of massage
- Adjustments to position, site, pace, and pressure for typical conditions. These can include tumor, surgical injury, neutropenia, thrombocytopenia, neuropathy, metastasis, existing or risk of lymphedema, existing or risk of deep vein thrombosis, compromised organ function, risks from medications, and fragile or unstable

## Continuing Education

Oncology massage therapists should further develop their skills through related advanced education. Such courses include lymphatic drainage, scar tissue mobilization, end-of-life care and supervised oncology massage clinics.