

## Get the most out of a first massage

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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The lights are dim, soft music is playing, and you're about to experience your first massage. But how do you know the massage therapist is right for you?

According to Beth Burgan, MFA, NCTMB, an assistant professor at Northwestern Health Sciences University, "For each client there is a therapist, and for each therapist there is a client."

Burgan says before you get your first massage, there are a few things you need to do first:

—Find a qualified therapist. You can do this by getting referrals from people you know—family, friends and coworkers. It's also a good idea to check a therapist's credentials.

—Make the first phone call. Find out what type of work the massage therapist does: relaxation, clinical, movement re-education and/or energy work.

—Set up an appointment with a therapist with a skill level that is compatible with the level of work that you need.

After selecting your therapist, here are some things to remember before, during and after your appointment to create the best possible experience:

—Make sure to drink enough water for two days prior to the appointment to ensure your muscles are properly hydrated. And drink extra water after your massage to flush out any accumulated materials released during the massage.

—Be as receptive and open to the massage process as possible, breath normally and relax your muscles and mind.

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—Don't eat just before a massage.

—Be on time; if you arrive in a frenzied, rushed state, it make take longer to relax.

—Plan enough time for your massage, around two hours for an hour massage.

—Take off only as much clothing as you are comfortable removing.

—Massage therapists have a draping policy, exposing only the part of the body being massaged.

—Communicate with your massage therapist about health information and allergies to oils/lotions/powders.

—Most massage therapists use music and dimmed lights, but if you prefer a different environment or no music, let your therapist know.

Burgan recommends scheduling several massages per year.

“A massage fills an empty tank,” she said. “When the tank gets empty, signs of distress appear. You may become short with people, moody, and aches and pains may arise. This is what tells you the tank is empty. You can judge when you need a massage based on your internal barometer and stress level.”

She adds that one massage per month is a good average for a person who takes good care of their body.

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