

### *Communication is vital*

A therapist trained in working with the seriously ill can explain the appropriateness and benefits of comfort-oriented massage for a particular individual. The massage therapist needs to be fully informed about the condition of a person receiving massage, and to hear honest feedback regarding the massage experience. Before an appointment, tell the therapist about any physical or emotional changes, even if they seem minor. He or she may want to consult with the physician or health care team before proceeding.

### *Massage for caregivers*

Caring for someone who is seriously ill may require demanding physical activities such as lifting or additional housework. An increased workload can result in the loss of sleep and less time to enjoy normal activities. Physical and emotional tension may build. Receiving a massage can ease tension, relieve muscle aches and fatigue, and restore the emotional and physical resources needed to continue giving care in the days or weeks to come.

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*It was so nice to be taken care of after so many months of  
taking care of others.  
—Wife of a Man with Cancer*

### *The gift of massage*

The difficulties of coping with a serious illness can be overwhelming. Regardless of how a person looks or feels, unconditional nurturing becomes essential. A skilled massage therapist can be an invaluable support during this challenging time for patient and caregiver alike.

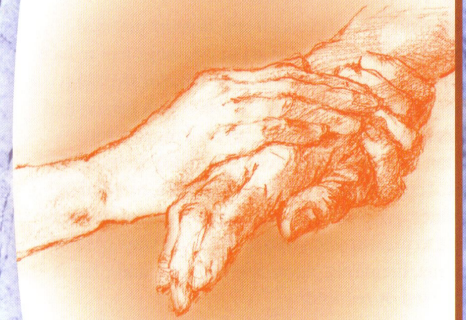
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## *Comfort Massage for the Seriously Ill*



*Support  
for the  
Body, Mind  
and Spirit*

A serious illness can be one of the most difficult challenges life can present. For those in hospital, home, convalescent or hospice care, comfort-oriented massage can relieve stress and anxiety, reduce pain and tension, and provide relaxation. Restorative to both body and spirit, caring human touch offers comfort and solace to those experiencing physical and emotional distress, the loss of function and the disruption of normal routines.

### *Enhancing quality of life*

Nurturing, skillful touch can support physical comfort in a number of ways. Massage can reduce muscle tightness and decrease painful swelling caused by fluid retention. It can help a person feel better after invasive treatments. Pressure sores often heal faster and their occurrence decreases as local circulation is gently increased to surrounding tissues. As attention shifts from physical discomfort to pleasurable sensation, the nervous system calms, breathing eases, rest deepens, and pain is relieved or reduced.

With an attentive ear and a calm, empathetic touch, a practitioner skilled in comfort massage can also help ease the emotional strain of illness and its consequences. This kind of accepting, non-demanding presence can bridge the isolation and loneliness experienced by one who is ill and bedridden, offering reassurance that they are still touchable regardless of their changing condition.

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*Where medication did not help calm my husband, massage did.*  
—Wife of a 76 Year Old Stroke Survivor

### *A gentle, adaptable approach*

Massage for the seriously ill is not a particular technique, but is an approach that aims to soothe, console and lift the spirits. A massage therapist can draw on the gentlest of techniques to relieve pain and provide reassurance in a wide range of situations.

A person who is not in pain may enjoy a full body massage, but often a shorter session such as a gentle hand, face, or foot massage may be more comforting. Increased sensitivity to touch can make many standard massage techniques uncomfortable. Broad, encompassing movements, and soothing, but penetrating static pressure are commonly used instead. Many massage therapists specialize in bodywork techniques which adapt well to working with the seriously ill. A few of these are Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch, Polarity Therapy, Comfort Touch, Compassionate Touch and Reiki.

Comfort massage can be given in almost any setting. The person receiving the massage can be in bed or seated upright in a chair or wheelchair, and may remain fully clothed. While benefits tend to increase with regular sessions, the frequency and length of sessions are based on individual needs.

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*I find patients have fewer side effects of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation when massaged prior to treatment.*  
—Bernie Siegel, M.D., Author of *Love, Medicine, and Miracles*

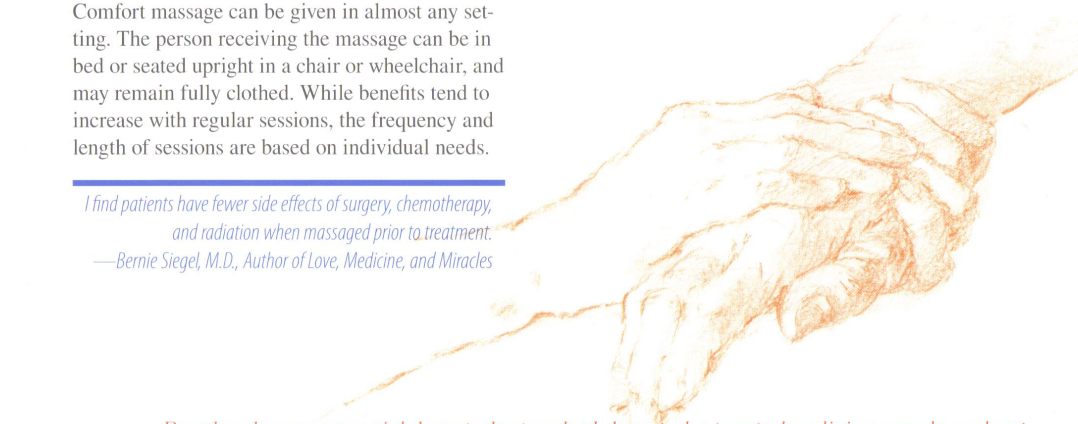
### *Touch for the dying*

A person approaching death may experience intense and rapidly changing feelings and physical responses. What is wanted or needed one day may not be the same the next. She or he may also experience periods of confusion, or slip in and out of awareness.

Caring touch is one way to make a difference in a person's remaining time with accepting and flexible nurturing. If a person wants to focus on staying alert in the present moment, massage can bring one's attention back to the body, to the here and now. If a person is afraid or confused, gentle touch may calm and comfort. Regardless of specific needs, skilled, attentive touch can reassure a person of his or her worth and humanity.

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*Massage is my moment of peace and contentment...no cares except the pleasure of having someone show care for me.*  
—65 Year Old Woman with Cancer



*People who are very sick long to be touched, long to be treated as living people and not diseases. A great consolation can be given to the very ill simply by touching their hand...gently massaging them...or breathing in the same rhythm gently with them.*  
—Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*