



Talking with Your Massage Therapist about Oncology Massage

The following questions and general statements in response may help you discuss oncology massage with your massage therapist. You may have additional questions to ask your therapist. All questions are important. If you are uncertain about working with a particular therapist, you may wish to ask your medical team and/or patient support services for referrals.

Please note that these questions and responses are not intended as medical advice. They are intended to help you open a dialogue with your therapist. Your therapist may speak more specifically to your particular needs.

1. Tell me how oncology massage is different from other massage?

The focus in oncology massage is to help you manage the short and long term side effects of treatment. It can help to support your body's ability to heal and can provide relief from symptoms like anxiety, fatigue, pain, nausea, and depression

Recent [research](#) has demonstrated that massage reduces anxiety. Some studies show that massage decreases short term pain, and may decrease use of pain medication.

2. What training do you have in oncology massage? Did it include hands on training?

Hands-on training is important because it means that your therapist has been observed within a class setting by an instructor in the field of oncology massage. The therapists listed in the OMT Locator service by the [Society for Oncology Massage](#) have at least one hands-on course or a recommended equivalent.

3. Tell me how and why you will adjust your massage approach to fit my needs.

I adjust my approach in each session, by applying appropriate modalities, using specific pressure levels, adjusting for positioning and site restrictions. I do this for your safety and comfort.

4. I have been told I am at risk for lymphedema. What training/experience do you have in this situation?

The response to this question is critical. The therapist should be able to tell you how and why he/she would modify the massage. Examples of responses to this question may be something like:

- "While I do not use manual lymph drainage techniques in my massage sessions, I have worked with cancer patients who are at risk. My massage sessions accommodate the area of involvement by adjusting my strokes, timing, and pressure level to help ensure your well being."
- "I have been trained in manual lymphatic drainage techniques and work with early stages of lymphedema. I don't do bandaging or provide exercises, as it is outside of my scope of training and practice."
- "I am a specialist in MLD-CDT work and provide compression bandaging as a part of my services. I am certified by LANA, the Lymphology Association of North America."