

Why Breast Massage?

by Debra Curties, RMT

Breasts are body tissues that can benefit tremendously from massage. They are susceptible to discomforts associated with menstrual and childbearing cycles and with common benign conditions, and are subject to more surgery, diagnostic procedures and trauma than we hear about or most of us would predict. Breast cancer is unfortunately common and involves a variety of treatments that alter tissues and cause pain and reduced mobility.

While most women experience substantial breast symptoms at some point in their lifetimes, statistics indicate that reporting to doctors is low. Massage therapists are even more unaware of the breast-related concerns of our clients. This lack of information and awareness is often in marked contrast to the degree of discomfort and worry the women are privately experiencing. It also means that these client needs are not receiving the types of treatment, education, support, and referral that we normally offer and which could help successfully address many breast tissue problems.

Why Breast Massage is Important

Although research support is not yet in place, common sense and clinical experience point to a tremendous role for massage therapy in promoting breast health:

1. Breasts are especially dependent on blood and lymphatic circulation, and have no inherent aids like muscle or joint activity to promote drainage. This is compounded by the common practice of wearing tight breast clothing that prevents the natural 'bounce' of the tissues. Chronic conditions of congestion and inadequate tissue clearance are associated with pain and degenerative tissue change.
2. Breast massage is primary care for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, as well as for rehabilitating tissues following injury or surgery. Massage therapists readily provide similar treatments for other body structures.
3. Massage therapists are particularly good at working with scars, and scarring is a common cause of breast congestion and pain.
4. Breast massage supports regular breast evaluation. Massage therapists are skilled palpators who, when knowledgeable about breast conditions, can identify lesions needing medical evaluation and can help monitor for tissue changes. Massage therapists are also in an excellent position to help clients become more comfortable with having their breasts evaluated and with breast self-examination.

Massage therapists often find ourselves in a limbo of indecision about breast massage, but increasingly clients are hearing about its benefits and seeking to receive it. As health care professionals, are we satisfied with the reactions they are receiving?

Next Issue: Learning Breast Massage

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