



10 Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Massage Therapist



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By Cade Holmseth, L.M.T., C.M.T.

1. Is the massage therapist licensed, or Nationally Certified?

Some municipalities and states do NOT require licensing. Committed professional massage therapists get a license, even if they aren't required. Sometimes a license isn't available. A national certification is available and is often required by many states in their licensing criteria. These are a couple of the many indicators to look for in finding the best therapist for your needs.

Minnesota, for example, is one of the few states left to adopt a statewide licensing program. Currently each city is put to the task of managing licensing criteria, which many don't have the resources or demand to. This leaves a lot of freedom for people who have only taken a weekend workshop or are sneaking into the business for illicit reasons to sneak in under the radar of any authorities.

2. How much training does your therapist have?

There are many types of massage available, and a range of training programs that can legally certify a therapist in the U.S. Not all of them are in any way equal. A spa masseuse can get nationally certified without having the rigorous training that a medical massage therapist goes through well beyond what the spa masseuse did. This can vary as much as several hundred hours of training and practice and advanced education in anatomy, kinesiology, etc. You may also have noticed that I called the spa person a masseuse and the medical massage person a therapist. This is starting to become more common in the culture of body workers who are trained in advanced techniques to separate themselves from the title "masseuse" or "masseur." There can be negative connotations with that title that can mean anything from less training to someone who works in the illicit trade.

Also, nationally certified and/or licensed massage therapists are required to take continuing education courses to maintain their certification or license. How many years of service have they been certified. or licensed? Each year means more training. Also, do they just keep to the minimums, or do they go above and beyond?

3. What kind of experience with bodywork does your therapist have?

Your experience can range from "none at all" to "I go every week". This can make a difference in what type of body work you prefer. One individual was given a gift certificate for a massage but had an "awful experience" because the therapist did a deep tissue massage that was extremely painful for the client...and she refused to try a massage again. The therapist may have been really good at a certain type of massage with different benefits as the goal, but the client only wanted a light massage geared towards relaxation.

In my professional experience I generally tend to find a trend of massage regulars desiring deeper work the more they receive massage, but that isn't always the case. Your therapist **MUST** have the tools to help you feel comfortable whatever the level of massage you desire, check in with you throughout the massage and make sure you are getting the results you want.

TIP: Your massage therapist **MUST** ask you what outcomes you want, look at your health history and listen carefully.

4. Does your massage therapist have information that will support your commitment to excellent health?

A great therapist offers tips and advice that will help you succeed in how you eat, exercise and take care of yourself. Bodywork is much more than massage—it's an attitude that encourages you to maintain a path of healthy living and body strength and agility. If you are dealing with something that the therapist is not best suited to aid you with or has helped you as much as they can, do they have people they can refer you to continue your progress? You can really tell a lot about a therapists' intent if they give you the education and resources that can prevent the need for frequent use of their services. That's when you really know they are in the business of helping people.

5. What are your goals and desired outcomes?

For example, if you want relaxation, does the atmosphere support what you want, with soothing music, scrubs, oils, fragrance and music?

If you have a sports injury, the relaxation only therapist isn't the right one for you. Light massage won't be as effective in healing as a therapist who specializes in therapeutic massage. In fact they may not even have the training and knowledge required to pinpoint an injury or injury pattern in the body and treat it to break up scar tissue, prevent adhesions, and speed the healing process along.

If your goals are more spiritual or energetic in nature, that is another skill set altogether that isn't often taught in a massage program. Some people are naturally intuitive or able to utilize energy and seek out other forms of training in the practices of reiki, or qi gong, or stones, etc.

6. Does your therapist have any other qualifications or specialties outside of massage?

A sports therapist knows how to use massage to quickly heal injuries, as well as help you prepare your body and joints to be the most functional in competition. This person can also do the relaxation that can help an athlete perform at their best. If the therapist also has an affiliation with a college sports program, they may very well have more experience than someone straight out of school. I myself am a professional dancer. I had been working to hone

my body and skills for years before I ever went to school for massage. I also have a BFA degree in dance which requires lots of somatic (body) training. I have knowledge of the body, how it works, how it breaks down, and methods of recovery that a person who may just be affiliated with a sports team would be completely jealous of.

7. Is the scheduling flexible to fit your needs?

We all have different jobs and passions in life. Some people have specific medical needs, others have families, etc. We also have different preferences for when we'd like massage or desire a different outcome.

Certain facilities, often larger companies and chains fall into this category, have set hours and lots of therapists. This can often lead to some convenience of being able to call up at the last second and getting in to get a massage, but may leave you with getting a different therapist every time. Some people don't mind that, but in my experience, people generally prefer someone they know and are comfortable with and who is familiar with the body and health history of the client.

Smaller and private practices may operate on a "by appointment only" standard, which typically means you can't just walk up to the place and get a massage without booking ahead of time. I operate this way with my business, because it provides me with flexibility to schedule around peoples' lives when needed and not be stuck by advertised hours. This means I can tend to a person at 6 am who threw out their back in the morning and needs to be able to get to work, or a person who absolutely has no time to get in other than on a Sunday because of family stuff (a large number of massage businesses or practitioners don't work Sundays). This means the client always gets the person they prefer, but may have to wait hours or days to do so if I am booked.

8. Is the location good for you?

If the location isn't convenient (close to work or home) you likely won't regularly go back...and you'll miss the incredible results of regular massage. The best case is to find a therapist who has a membership program that provides consistent access to healing massages, but if you have to drive 30-40 minutes or through rush hour traffic to get to them it'll become a burden instead of a healing tool. Ultimately you want to find a therapist that you jive with on many levels, (I've had people follow me to my current practice from other locations that are a 40 min. drive because they wanted me to be their therapist), but it's important that you feel safe with the location and comfortable with distance and not put off by parking, etc.

9. What kind of history or awards or certifications does your therapist have? How do you know?

A licensed therapist is required to post their licenses and credentials in plain sight of anyone who comes to see them. If you haven't gone into their office yet, sometimes the internet or

print materials can help. You can look up directories such as NCBTMB (National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork) to see if the therapist is listed. You might rely on a television or print ad to be truthful, although sometimes they aren't because they aren't regulated as well as they should be. You might also look for associations they are part of.

10. Does your therapist have any testimonials? How many and are they from “real” people?

If you get a testimonial from a friend or colleague, you obviously know it's from a real person. If you see it on their personal website or Facebook page, it's a little harder to tell. They may have misspoken a quote, or made up the person altogether. If you can verify the legitimacy of the practice and years of service that can be an indicator of an honest business. If quotes are in multiple locations, that can make falsifications easy to spot. If the comments are made from an outside entity though, that is the gold standard for a real testimonial. Look up an online service such as Yelp or Amazon and see what people have been saying about them. If they're on Facebook, comments on their feed from other individuals can be a source of testimonials that are easily traceable (you can message the individual yourself if you wanted).

Now that you know what to look for in a therapist, it will be a snap to utilize the powerful benefits of massage therapy and bodywork to be the healthiest person you can be and live your best life.

Watch for my next article as I share more information about how bodywork can help you.

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Cade Holmseth is committed to your long term health and well-being. Explore the studio on the [website](#), and discover all the benefits you'll enjoy as a treasured client.

Cade will soothe all your aches and pains, but don't just think of his services as a therapeutic remedy. He believes in preventative care too and in educating his clients. He also believes in making sure that the health benefits of Bodywork can continue to work long after you leave the office.

Award-Winning
Cade Holmseth