

## Learning Breast Massage

by Debra Curties, RMT

*“Breast massage techniques are simple to do. They are largely modifications of common petrissage strokes adapted to the size and shape of the breast. Once a practitioner feels comfortable with the idea of working with breasts and with the inherent client therapist relationship requirements, mastery of the technical skills is quite simple and straightforward.” **Breast Massage**, p. 151*

Most massage therapists struggle when asked to give breast massage because they have never reached a point of basic comfort with this work. Our profession’s uneasiness with breast massage has led to avoidance – both in clinical practice and in massage school education. Schools who teach breast massage often do so in a limited way that unfortunately usually means that their graduates do not feel ready to offer it to clients. The irony is that until our profession makes sure that massage therapists are being properly trained in this area, either women are being denied treatment that may be very beneficial for them, or they are being treated by practitioners who probably shouldn’t be doing the work.

The challenges in doing breast massage well are not technical – simple adaptations of standard Swedish massage and hydrotherapy approaches are really all that is involved. Breast treatment does not take long and can be fit effectively into various types of treatment plans. Supportive work in nearby structures like pectoralis major is also familiar in nature. It is easy for a competent massage therapist to learn fairly quickly how to be thorough and effective in treating the breast and surrounding tissues.

In addition to access to good breast massage classes, maturity and professionalism are the key prerequisites. Massage therapists have to be able to handle circumstances in the therapeutic relationship where greater interpersonal skill and delicacy are required. Breast massage is just one of those circumstances, and as such, the massage therapist falls back on training fundamentals like communication skills, client centeredness, consent-taking, boundary-setting, self monitoring, and so on.

The therapist who wants to provide breast massage needs the following:

- a comfort level in talking with clients about breast treatment
- information about breast anatomy, tissue structure, and common breast conditions
- good case history taking and consent-related practices and the understanding that breast massage requires specific consent
- a client-centered approach with a high level of professional ethics and good professional boundaries
- a comfortable educational environment in which to learn the techniques and sufficient practice to feel confident before treating clients
- an appreciation of when breast massage should not be offered or when the practitioner in question may not be the best person to provide the work

Some clients pose additional concerns, for example if the client has a cancer diagnosis or a sexual abuse background, and it makes sense that extra training may be needed before the massage therapist is qualified to work in these areas.