

WHAT DOES CLINICAL SPORTS MASSAGE THERAPY LOOK LIKE?

There is a term used in clinical and sports massage called the clinical process. This process of assessing and treating a client is different from how most massage therapists work. "All too often, therapists memorize techniques and then blindly apply them hoping something will work" (Lurch, p. 65). The clinical process looks at each client as an individual requiring a unique, customized treatment protocol.

The clinical process begins with an assessment. Before the therapist begins to work and before the client even gets on the table, an assessment takes place. The therapist may use various forms of evaluation to determine what factors may be contributing to the client's complaint. The therapist may utilize orthopedic testing, do a stationary postural analysis against a grid chart, check for discrepancies in leg length associated with pelvic instability, assess range of motion in a joint, or muscular imbalances between the right and left side of the body. Whatever assessment protocol is used, it is important to remember that each individual is looked at with an open-mind. Even if two people have anterior knee pain, the treatment for them could very well be distinctly different.

The art of assessment is not just for determining what to treat, but also what not to treat. A client's pain could be caused by a condition that is unable to be treated by massage. In some cases, the condition could even be made worse through massage if the therapist isn't careful.

The next step in the clinical process is treatment. Once the therapist has listened to the client's history, done an evaluation and determined it is safe to proceed, then the actual treatment can begin. Like the assessment, the treatment doesn't use a one size-fits-all approach. The therapist uses many different modalities and techniques to get the desired end result. Oftentimes, the beginning of the treatment does not even start at or near the point of pain. "Massage therapists must follow the kinetic chain from the area of complaint to the related areas of the body" (Lurch, p. 66). The clinical massage therapist realizes that in many instances, the problem is not where the pain lies.

After envisioning this scene, you can start to see how clinical massage is unique and different from therapeutic or other forms of massage. It is less of a technique or style of massage and more of a process; it is a clinical process. To be successful at this type of massage, the therapist requires: 1.) A strong understanding of the client's underlying musculoskeletal anatomy 2.) An ability to perform a thorough assessment, and 3.) The skill to formulate the most effective treatment and client self-care regimen for that specific condition (Rattray, p. 4)