

10 Techniques to Watch

1. Energy work. Everything—living or not—is composed of energy moving at one rate or another. New discoveries in the area of quantum physics are proving the interrelationship of energy systems—so is it any wonder that hands-on techniques aimed at improving health by addressing the human energy field are gaining in acceptance and popularity? According to Jerry E. Wesch, Ph.D., president of the International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine, "It does appear that energy modalities are a natural for bodywork practitioners, particularly those with a spiritual bent. Some, like reiki, are very accessible and blend well with massage work." These are the techniques in use now: Polarity, reiki, Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch, chakra balancing.

2. Asian bodywork. Leave it to Americans to claim something thousands of years old as a trend! Whether that's appropriate or not, there's no denying that ancient bodywork techniques from Asia are making inroads here. From shiatsu to Thai massage; tuina to amma therapy; acupressure to Jin Shin Do; and medical qi gong to chi nei tsang, "The word is spreading that Asian medicines have something to offer Americans," says Debra Howard, president of the American Organization of Bodywork Therapies of Asia. That "something" involves a more proactive role on the part of the client in maintaining his or her health and preventing health problems down the road. A new focus on research and recent specialty certification by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork are two flag-posts indicating greater growth for this area of touch.

3. Sports massage. The Olympics; the Boston Marathon; Major League Baseball; pro football. Over the past decade, the use of massage to improve athletes' performance has taken a giant leap forward. You name the sport—any sport—and massage therapy is on the team. For those interested in addressing specific muscle groups and injuries while contributing to athletes' success, sports massage is the best game plan around.

4. Emergency response. Massage therapists have for years willingly volunteered at areas devastated by floods, fires, earthquakes and hurricanes. Now, after an outpouring of massage therapists volunteered touch for rescue workers at Ground Zero in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, public agencies better understand the benefits of touch during and following tragedy. In addition to the American Massage Therapy Association's Massage Emergency Response Team, local and statewide volunteer teams are surfacing around the nation, giving expression to the heart and courage of many in this field.

5. Spa massage. According to an International Spa Association survey, from 1994 to 1999 the number of U.S. spas grew by 19 percent annually, and 95 million annual visits are made to U.S. spas. Since massage is the number-one requested service at spas, what this means for massage therapists is a bonanza of job opportunities. Spas provide therapists with employment and educational opportunities not found anywhere else, and eliminate the need to self-promote. As the spa industry continues to grow, so will spas' need for massage therapists.

6. *Aromatherapy.* No longer considered an offbeat New Age practice, aromatherapy is in widespread use in massage session rooms, clinics and hospitals. Research over the past decade has proven that essential oils—inhaled or applied topically—can result in greater calm, improved alertness, better relaxation and more, depending on the type of oil used. According to Teshan Laucirica, spokesperson for the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy, aromatherapy massage, which involves adding essential oils to massage oils or lotions, is one of the fastest-growing areas in aromatherapy.

7. *Massage done with the feet.* As therapists search for ways to stay in the field while preventing injuries, they are looking past their hands—to their feet. With so many techniques now afoot—including No Hands Massage, Barefoot Shiatsu, the Compressive Deep Tissue technique, Ashiatsu and Barefoot Basics—feet and toes are being utilized as an alternative to hands and elbows, leading to fewer hand-and-arm injuries and less back pain.

8. *Craniosacral therapy.* Interest in this light-touch technique, which addresses the craniosacral system, has surged in recent years. According to the Craniosacral Therapy Association of North America's vice president, Dan Burgess, "The increasing popularity of craniosacral therapy with massage professionals is undeniable. In addition to its remarkable effectiveness in relieving a wide range of conditions, many massage therapists appreciate the relief from repetitive strain afforded by this gentle style of therapy. It can be easily blended with a regular massage to deepen the effects, so seamlessly that the client may not even be aware that the two approaches are being used together." CranioSacral Therapy (spelled this way as a means of differentiation), the technique developed by John Upledger, D.O., and offered by The Upledger Institute, has been taught to more than 50,000 health-care practitioners, and enrollment of massage therapists has increased by 35 percent compared to just five years ago.

9. *Geriatric massage.* This very specialized type of massage is tailored to elders' needs. Many physicians are referring and endorsing geriatric massage for their patients, according to Sharon Puszko, director of the Day-Break Geriatric Massage Project. One of the main reasons for this is that the world's population age 65 and older is growing by 800,000 people a month, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The bureau predicts that this aging will continue well into the 21st century, with the numbers of older people continuing to rise.

10. *Medical massage.* Despite the debate about what "medical massage" really means, a growing number of therapists are seeking training and certification in this specialization, which focuses on massaging people with medical conditions. In addition, some nurses and physicians are learning medical massage from the American Manual Medicine Association, and taking touch directly to their patients. And graduates of medical-massage programs are landing jobs in hospitals, chiropractic offices, and medical and physical-therapy clinics.

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