

A First Timer's Guide to Remedial Massage

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What happens in a remedial massage appointment?

“Remedial” massage means it provides a remedy (“remed-ial” – see the connection?) to a specific injury, condition, or dysfunction. It is generally differentiated from relaxation massage, however, if your dysfunction is chronic stress, then a relaxation massage can still be considered remedial.

Remedial massage is characterised by movement assessments before and after treatment and a treatment plan that targets specified muscles, tendons, ligaments, or joints.

This article answers your questions about the sequence of events, what to wear, what your massage therapist will (or should) do, and what to expect after your remedial massage treatment.

If you still have other questions, [go to the online article](#) and post a comment.

If you have feedback about the contents of this article, shoot me an email: hello@massage.melbourne.



Format

Before your first appointment, you’ll fill out an intake form. I use an online form so that when you arrive for your appointment, we save time and give you more time in assessment and treatment. If you haven’t already filled it out before you arrive, show up 5–10 minutes early so you can fill it in without taking time away from your treatment. This will also give your therapist some time to review and process your information.

When you arrive at my clinic, there will be herbal tea available in the waiting room. If there happens to be no one at the desk, just take a seat and relax. Feel free to use the bathroom before your time begins to avoid needing it halfway through your treatment.

Initial consult

I'll greet you, and once you're in the room, we'll have a chat and do an initial consult. This is where we discuss what your primary reason for visiting is, what may have caused it, and anything else you feel is important. I may ask you some supplementary questions about your diet, sleep, and your environment.

Initial Assessment

Next is your assessment. If all you're looking for is simply a deep relaxation massage, this might be very brief, and we may discuss your stressors.

If it's a physical or mechanical complaint that you have, we take measurements, assess posture, or perform movement, strength and flexibility tests as needed. This may involve using a posture app on a tablet. I may use my hands to palpate (explore by touch) any problem areas you've noted.

The ideal thing to wear for the assessment stage is sports gear, but whatever you are wearing will be fine.

Treatment Plan

Following your assessment, I will suggest a treatment plan for you. You can make any changes you like before we go ahead with the massage.

This is where **consent** happens – you provide your consent to treatment, or if you are not satisfied, you have the option of withholding consent and asking for other options.

Remember – everything you say is 100% confidential.

Treatment

I will step just outside the door of the room while you get changed.

Don't rush! Take your time and *relax*. Make yourself comfortable on the table, taking note of my request either to lay face-up, face-down, or on your side.

When you are ready to begin, just call out "ready!" and I'll come back in.

What To Wear

Everyone:

Most people traditionally keep on underwear and take everything else off.

However, if this thought is confronting for you, then you can keep on whatever you're comfortable with. In some cases, I have even provided massage to people fully-clothed and still had great results.

I've had some clients who were more shy and preferred to keep on a pair of running shorts or a tee-shirt, which we worked around or through to get to different muscles. If this is how you feel relaxed and secure, I'm happy to work with you like this. I want you to feel comfortable.

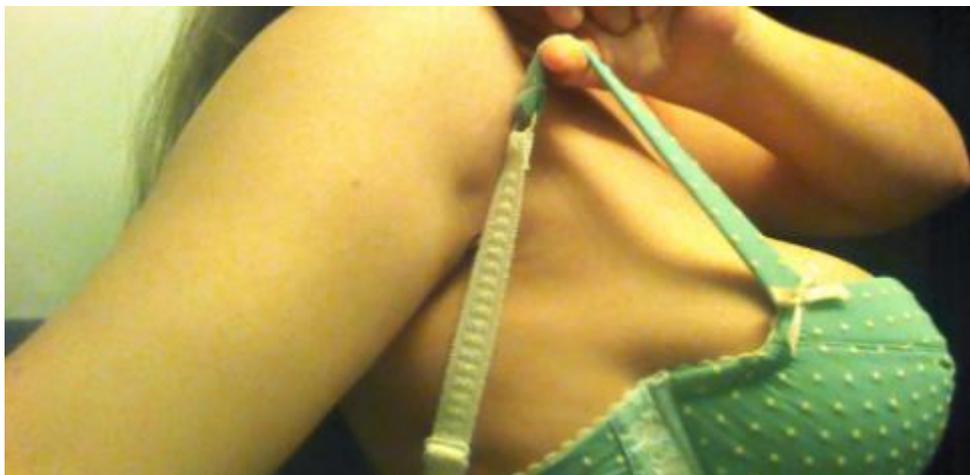


If you don't feel secure without keeping some clothes on, don't feel pressured to take them off.

I've also had clients who didn't give a damn about being naked, and I had to ask them to put back on their underwear bottoms! At least they've all stayed under the sheets...

Ladies:

Most of the time, you can keep on your bra and just tuck the shoulder straps under your arms, so I can easily access your shoulder muscles. Like so:



Tuck your straps under your arms.

When you're lying face-down, we'll unclasp you so I can work on your back, and then re-fasten before you get up or turn over.

A sports bra or crop top is usually *not* a good idea, as the straps or fabric are not easy to work around. Avoid these types:



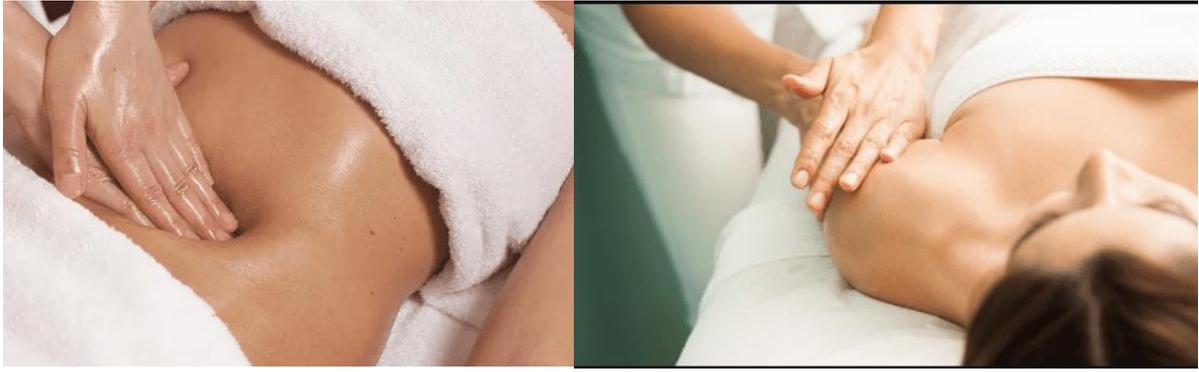
Examples of the type of bra NOT to wear, if you want your back and shoulders massaged.

The easiest and best option, if it's comfortable, is a strapless bra, such as the one below. This allows me to access the muscles in your upper chest, which are the muscles primarily responsible for rounding your shoulders forwards.



*An example of the ideal bra to wear to your remedial massage.
Something that has a clasp at the back.*

I'll tuck the draping in under your ribs on each side (see pics below), so it's nice and snug and I can move your arms around smoothly without any draping 'malfunctions.' When working on the chest, I frequently take your arms up over your head to stretch your pectoralis minor muscle. If you're not tucked in properly, this can lead to problems.



Examples of draping around the chest. Note the snug, tucked-in fit.



Assisted stretching for the pectoralis minor muscle (shown in red).

Men:

Please avoid wearing trunks and boxers if you want your legs done — best stick to briefs. Boxer-brief style trunks are particularly problematic for draping on your legs. Please don't wear those if you can avoid it!

Bad options:



Good options:



Everyone again:

If you know you want your glutes worked on, the best option is thong or tanga style undies. This enables me to tuck in the towels securely and still get proper access to your glutes. They're the biggest muscles in your body, they will probably need some attention!

However, again, if you are not comfortable with this, I can still massage your glutes through the towels or sheets and get sound therapeutic effects. In this case, I may use my elbows through the draping to get some long slow stretches happening on specific muscle attachment points.

In some cases, if we are moving you around a lot during your treatment, a pair of loose running shorts and a singlet/tank top may be the best option. In this case, we don't use towels or draping at all. This can be preferable if your treatment is for a sports event, or if your appointment is very short and we don't want to take up time changing in and out of clothes.



If you want your gluteal muscles massaged, choose your underwear wisely. Wearing trunks would make this impossible.

If you are just having your upper or lower body treated in your remedial massage, there may be no need to take off your trousers or top – whatever is comfortable *for you*.

Each time you turn over on the table, I will keep your body covered. There is even an electric blanket on my treatment table to keep you toasty in the colder months!

Is Breast Massage a Thing?

Yes, it is, and there is even some reasonable research behind it for [breastfeeding mothers](#), for [cosmetic breast implant soreness](#), and even just for [general health](#) (though this is more for relaxation than as a remedial treatment).

BUT... obviously, there is a *lot* of opportunity for inappropriate touching during a massage that includes the breasts. As such, the vast majority of therapists simply don't do it, and *you should not expect it as a standard*.

I will never massage your breasts *unless* it is as part of a [manual lymphatic drainage](#) treatment. In my practice, you must provide your express written consent, additionally co-signed by someone you know.

If you want a support person with you in the room while I'm providing this treatment, I invite you to do so – in fact, I prefer it.

Draping & Covering



Draping for the legs should look like this photo.

We'll keep you covered with soft towels or sarongs for warmth and modesty at all times. I like to use sheets or sarongs as they don't leave imprints in your skin and give you "towel-face"!



On your back, the draping should come up to – but securely line and not expose – your crotch.

Check your therapist's credentials

Do check whether the practitioner you are seeing is a member of a reputable professional association. If not, they may be unqualified, or even uninsured if you get injured. There may even be a bad reason why they are not an association member, such as a criminal history of assault. You have a right to ask.

As a member of the [Massage & Myotherapy Australia](#) professional association, I abide by the association's [Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics](#). These standards include published [Draping Guidelines](#) that protect your privacy.

What To Do If Your Therapist Is Unprofessional

There should be absolutely no touching of genitals during a remedial massage. If that's what you're looking for, there are other options out there for you, and remedial is not one of them.

If your therapist touches you inappropriately, your first option is to tell them "hey, be more careful." You should get an immediate, *sincere* apology, an immediate adjustment of technique, and it should definitely not happen ever again – even accidentally.

If it clearly was not accidental, your next option is to tell them that you don't feel comfortable and you want to stop the treatment and leave. Please, don't be afraid to do this – your safety and security are paramount. The therapist should then leave the room, allow you to dress, and let you go without hindrance. If they happen to demand payment from you (which they

definitely should not), then tell them you will call them in the next few days to discuss it. This will give you time to decide what to do.

If this ever happens, don't try to solve the problem at the time. There is plenty of time to figure things out afterwards and decide what to do. Your first priority is to get yourself to a place of safety. Call someone you trust for support as soon as possible.

If you ever have any problems with a remedial massage or myotherapy treatment with any practitioner, contact their professional association to ask for support, for information, or to lay a complaint. An independent ethics committee will investigate your allegations, and charges may be laid with the police. In these situations, the ethics committee will be on *your* side, *not* the therapist's.

If that doesn't resolve it, contact the government organisation that deals with consumer affairs in your area. In Victoria (Australia), this is [Consumer Affairs Victoria](#).

Consumer Affairs can also assist you if you have been over-charged or double-charged and can't get your money back. Finally, they can also help you with any other complaint about the business practices of a practitioner (false advertising, tax avoidance, etc.)



On your back, the draping should come down to – but not expose – your butt crack.

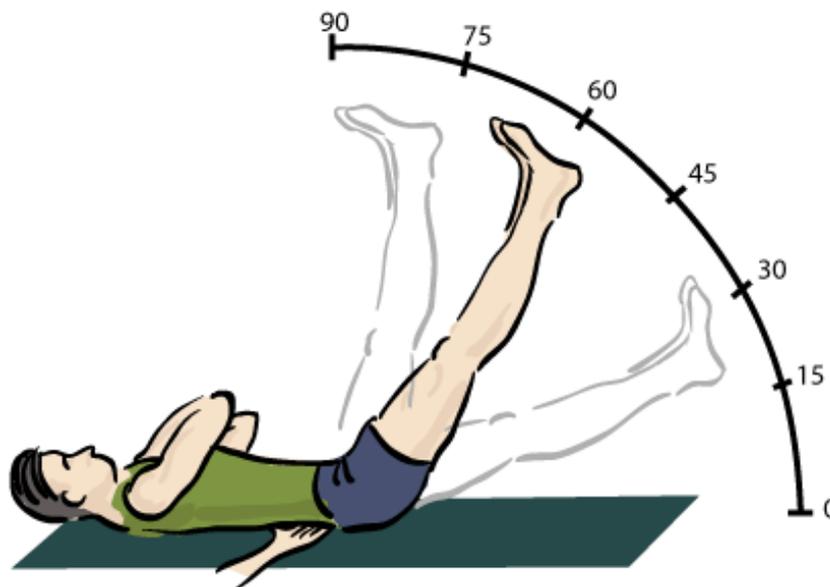
At the close of your treatment

Re-Assessment and Therapeutic Movement

We'll do any relevant tests or re-tests to see what effect the massage has had. Hopefully some improvements!

Then, if needed, you'll learn any corrective stretches and/or strengthening movements to do, so that you are more likely to maintain the positive outcomes we achieve. These will be customised to suit your level of difficulty and will also take into account any injuries or disabilities you might have.

Remember that if you have a dysfunction, and you choose not to follow through with your corrective movements, you are likely to end up right back where you started!



Post-Treatment Advice

You may also learn about lifestyle habits or patterns you can adapt to avoid future injury. As with any changes you make, whether or not you choose to make them is over to you!

I'll also advise you about what you should expect to feel and notice in the coming days. If you feel anything significantly different, get in touch and let me know.

As always, you are in total control. My role is to serve you, my valued client, and support you towards positive changes, pain-free living, and peak performance, in any way I can.

In some cases, we may refer you to another practitioner who better suits your needs. In other cases, we'll discuss whether and when you should book in for follow-up treatment with me.



Client consults should take place at the start and end of your appointment.

During the days following your massage

You may experience some niggly discomfort or soreness as your body changes and adjusts. If this is your first ever massage, or if you haven't had a massage for a long time, this is especially true. It is also quite normal and even healthy.

However, there should ideally be no recurrence of the pain that brought you to the clinic in the first place. If we are not seeing improvements to your initial condition, we may need to change what we're doing. Get in touch and tell me if you feel like something isn't right.

There is a difference between post-massage soreness and being in pain!



I like to email my clients a couple of days after each treatment just to check in and see how you are feeling, and to ask for feedback. Even if there has been no change to your condition, that is still valuable information and will inform what we do next.

Why am I sore after a massage?

Post-massage soreness is mainly down to a phenomenon called “[central sensitisation](#).” This is the same reason you feel sore after a heavy gym workout or long run, a.k.a. “[DOMS](#)“).

Central sensitisation basically means your body has had *loads* of sensory input – in this case, from the massage – and needs time to process it all. It doesn’t know how to handle the unusually large amount of incoming information in such a short time. After all, it’s not often you get kneaded and stretched through your *entire body* within just one hour!

So your brain looks at this tremendous amount of sudden input and kind of says, “this isn’t normal; something must be wrong. I’m going to give you some pain signalling so you calm to heck down.” This is a natural defence response. My theory is that it protects us from over-exerting ourselves when we aren’t trained and ready for large amounts of exercise.

Since you use your muscles for exercise, and the massage is stimulating your muscles, I reckon your brain can’t tell the difference between me doing something with your muscles and you doing something with your muscles. It’s as if your brain thinks you just did a HIIT workout for a whole straight hour. It’s all the same to your brain.

As your brain slowly realises that everything is fine, the soreness fades.

Often what then happens is that after a day or two, you feel fantastic.

And the good news is, like exercise training, the more massage you get, the less post-massage soreness you experience. In fact, your level of enjoyment of the entire experience during the treatment and for several days after quite quickly becomes immensely enjoyable.



The importance of your home-care stretching and strengthening

If your remedial massage was focused on correcting dysfunctional patterns, then the success or failure of the massage is 90% dependent upon whether or not you follow through with your home-care.

I'll make it as easy as I possibly can, from my end, for you to follow through accordingly. I utilise instructional [YouTube videos](#) and step-by-step guidance via email to help you. I am also available by phone or email if you have any questions, or if anything is at all unclear.

Doing your corrective movements during the first few days following a corrective remedial massage is absolutely crucial. If you simply walk out of the clinic back into the same patterns that brought you in, we just end up covering the same territory all over again next time.

I understand how difficult it can be to change long-standing movement or postural patterns – I deal with this difficulty myself. I don't give anyone a hard time about it.

Instead, I empower you with a clear understanding of why you're doing each of your customised exercises. I also give you the best tools you could ever find to make these positive changes.

I'm on your side.

Let's do this.