



CLINICAL GUIDELINES

Massage Therapy

V1.1.2021

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MT-1.0: Criteria for the Provision of Massage Therapy Services

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MT-1.1: Definitions

Activities of Daily Living

- Activities of Daily Living include Basic Activities of Daily Living and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living.
 - ◆ **Basic Activities of Daily Living** are oriented towards taking care of one's own physical needs. These activities include walking, changing positions, dressing, and personal hygiene.
 - ◆ **Instrumental Activities of Daily Living** are more complex and support independent living within the home and community. These activities may include driving, housecleaning, meal preparation, and shopping.

Massage Therapy Services

- Massage Therapy Services are those within the scope of a licensed/certified provider in the applicable jurisdiction.

Exacerbation

- An Exacerbation occurs when previously improved functional deficits recur following a plateau in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living. This results in a significant decline in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living when compared to the pre-exacerbation levels of function. A significant decline must be quantified. This decline can be demonstrated by a worsening of equal or greater value than an established Minimally Clinical Important Difference (MCID) or Minimum Detectable Change (MDC) on a standardized assessment for the individual's condition.

Generally Accepted Standards of Practice

- Generally Accepted Standards of Practice are widely-accepted clinical concepts and practices based on credible scientific evidence published in the peer-reviewed literature and/or evidence-based guidelines.

Maintenance Massage Therapy Services

- Maintenance Massage Therapy Services are those that are performed to maintain the individual's current condition or to prevent or slow deterioration of the individual's condition. Maintenance Massage Therapy Services are not considered Medically Necessary.

Medically Necessary Massage Therapy Services

- Medically Necessary Massage Therapy Services are those that are reasonable and necessary, based on Generally Accepted Standards of Practice, for the evaluation, diagnosis and treatment to restore lost function resulting from an injury or illness. Medically Necessary Massage Therapy Services are not primarily for the convenience of the individual, the health care provider, or other physicians or health care providers.

Minimally Clinical Important Difference (MCID)

- Minimally Clinical Important Difference (MCID) is the smallest change in the score of a standardized assessment tool that is identified to be beneficial. The MCID is a statistical value established in published, peer-reviewed research.

Minimum Detectable Change (MDC)

- Minimum Detectable Change (MDC) is a change in the score of a standardized assessment tool that is greater than measurement error. The MDC is a statistical value established in published, peer-reviewed research.

Palliative Massage Therapy Services

- Palliative Massage Therapy Services are those performed to alleviate symptoms without providing corrective benefit to the condition. An individual receiving Palliative Massage Therapy Services, in most instances, demonstrates varying lapses between treatments. Palliative Massage Therapy Services are not considered Medically Necessary. Please review **MT-3.3 Condition Specific Considerations** for condition specific considerations of Massage Therapy Services for Cancer Pain.

Preventative Massage Therapy Services

- Preventative Massage Therapy Services are those performed in the management of the asymptomatic individual. Preventative Massage Therapy Services are not considered Medically Necessary.

Red Flags

- Red flags are signs or symptoms that suggest the presence of life or limb threatening conditions and require additional evaluation, immediate referral, or medical co-management. Red flags are likely to reflect a serious underlying disease. Red flags include findings that may indicate conditions such as:
 - ◆ Aneurysm or dissection
 - ◆ Cancer
 - ◆ Cauda equina syndrome
 - ◆ Fracture
 - ◆ Infection
 - ◆ Progressive neurologic conditions
 - ◆ Suicidal ideation

MT-1.2: Indications for Treatment

Massage Therapy Services will be considered Medically Necessary when current information is submitted to demonstrate that ALL of the following criteria have been met:

- Massage Therapy Services are safe and effective for the individual's condition based on Generally Accepted Standards of Practice as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**.
- Massage Therapy Services are for the treatment of a condition that is musculoskeletal in origin, or a select non-musculoskeletal condition specifically included in **MT-3.1 Included Conditions**.
- There must be a direct therapeutic relationship between the complaint and treatment.
- Any Red Flags have been appropriately addressed based on Generally Accepted Standards of Practice as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**.
- Massage Therapy Services for the treatment of a non-musculoskeletal condition listed in **MT-3.1 Included Conditions** must include confirmation of medical evaluation and diagnosis from a qualified practitioner.
- Massage Therapy Services for the treatment of minors must include confirmation of medical evaluation and diagnosis from a qualified practitioner.
- Massage Therapy Services address quantified pain or quantified deficits in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living that necessitate Massage Therapy Services based on Generally Accepted Standards of Practice as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**. A list of recommended standardized assessments to quantify restrictions in Activities of Daily Living and to track functional progress is included in **MT-2.2 Recommended Standardized Assessments** for musculoskeletal conditions and **MT-3.2 Recommended Standardized Assessments** for non-musculoskeletal conditions.
- Massage Therapy Services are expected to result in significant, measurable, progressive improvement in Pain and/or Activities of Daily Living within a reasonable and generally predictable period of time based on Generally Accepted Standards of Practice as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**
- The frequency, duration, and quantity of Massage Therapy Services performed must be based on:
 - ◆ The severity of clinical findings
 - ◆ The presence or absence of complicating factors
 - ◆ The natural history of the condition
 - ◆ The expectation for progressive improvement in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living
 - ◆ Generally Accepted Standards of Practice as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**
- As the individual improves with treatment, less frequent Massage Therapy Services are needed. Massage Therapy Services can be supplemented with a self-care program.

- The complexity of the individual's condition requires the clinical judgment and knowledge of a qualified provider.
- The submitted clinical information must establish the individual's current condition and Medical Necessity for Massage Therapy Services based on Generally Accepted Standards of Practice as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**.

Additional Indications for Continuation of Massage Therapy Services

In addition to the requirements listed above, requests for Continuation of Massage Therapy Services (after the initial request) must include current information to demonstrate that ANY of the following criteria have been met:

- An Exacerbation occurs as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**, and Massage Therapy Services are expected to result in a return to the pre-exacerbation ability to perform Activities of Daily Living.
- Quantified measures of pain and/or function indicate significant improvement in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living attributable to recent Massage Therapy Services for the condition. A significant response within a reasonable and generally predictable period of time may be demonstrated through ANY of the following:
 - ◆ An improvement of equal or greater value than an established MCID, as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**, on a standardized assessment for the individual's condition.
 - ◆ An improvement of equal or greater value than an established MDC, as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**, on a standardized assessment for the individual's condition.
 - ◆ Significant and quantified improvement in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**.

Additional Requirements for Retrospective Review of Massage Therapy Services

In addition to the requirements listed above, when retrospective reviews (for Massage Therapy Services rendered in the past) are allowed, the submitted information must adequately support that the Massage Therapy Services were performed on each date of service being requested.

MT-1.3: Non-Indications

The following Massage Therapy Services are considered NOT Medically Necessary:

- Maintenance Massage Therapy Services, Preventative Massage Therapy Services, and Palliative Massage Therapy Services as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**.
- Massage Therapy Services provided for individuals without quantified pain, quantified deficits in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living, or a standardized assessment demonstrating the Medical Necessity of care for an included non-musculoskeletal condition to necessitate initial or continued Massage Therapy Services as described in **MT-1.2 Indications for Treatment**.
- Massage Therapy Services following a plateau or lack of improvement in quantified pain, quantified deficits in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living, or a standardized assessment demonstrating improvement in the condition as described in **MT-1.2 Indications for Treatment**.
- Massage Therapy Services for the treatment of disorders that are non-musculoskeletal in origin (e.g. systemic, visceral, central nervous system, or infectious conditions), other than those described in **MT-3.1 Included Conditions**.
- Massage Therapy Services performed at a frequency, duration, or quantity that exceeds the amount of Medically Necessary Massage Therapy Services for the individual's condition as described in **MT-1.2 Indications for Treatment**.
- Massage Therapy Services related to recreational activities or sport-specific performance in the absence of quantified deficits in the ability to perform Activities of Daily Living as described in **MT-1.2 Indications for Treatment**.
- Massage Therapy Services that are performed in the presence of Red Flags that have not been appropriately addressed based on Generally Accepted Standards of Practice as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**.
- Massage Therapy Services that replace or delay other medically necessary care based on Generally Accepted Standards of Practice as defined in **MT-1.1 Definitions**.
- Massage Therapy Services rendered when the complexity of the individual's condition does not require the clinical judgment and knowledge of a qualified provider. Massage Therapy Services for conditions of lesser complexity, which do not require treatment by a qualified provider are not considered Medically Necessary Massage Therapy Services, even if they are performed by a qualified provider.
- Retrospective Massage Therapy Services that lack adequate submitted information to support that Massage Therapy Services were performed on each date of service requested and/or do not meet the other requirements outlined in **MT-1.2 Indications for Treatment**.
- Massage Therapy Services that are provided under the same or related body-part or diagnosis as other more efficacious services are considered duplicate care. Duplicate Massage Therapy Services may not be Medically Necessary, as the individual's condition can improve with care provided under one treatment plan and by one provider.

MT-1.4: Benefits, Coverage Policies, and Eligibility

Benefits, coverage policies, and eligibility issues pertaining to each health plan and/or jurisdiction may take precedence over eviCore's medical necessity criteria. The final determination of reimbursement for Massage Therapy Services is the decision of the health plan and is based on the individual's policy or benefit entitlement structure as well as claims processing rules. Providers should reference health plan policies for covered and non-covered Massage Therapy Services.

MT-1.5: Administrative Rules

The following submission time frames generally apply for health plans that require authorization:

- **Initial Concurrent Requests:** While time frames may change based on jurisdiction and/or health plan rules, initial requests are typically submitted within seven (7) calendar days of the requested date of service.
- **Concurrent Continuation of Treatment Requests:** While time frames may vary based on jurisdiction and/or health plan rules, any subsequent concurrent request must generally be submitted within seven (7) calendar days of the requested date of service.
- **Retrospective Requests:** While this type of review is dependent upon jurisdiction and/or health plan rules, dates of service greater than seven (7) calendar days in the past are generally considered a retrospective review.

MT-2.0: Clinical Considerations for Musculoskeletal Conditions

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MT-2.1: Etiology

Submitted information must show symptoms are caused by a condition that is musculoskeletal in origin (as opposed to symptoms originating from systemic, visceral, central nervous system or infectious conditions). For symptoms caused by non-musculoskeletal conditions, refer to **MT-3.0: Clinical Considerations for Non-Musculoskeletal Conditions**.

MT-2.2: Recommended Standardized Assessments

Standardized assessment tools are used to assess and track changes in pain levels or in restrictions of Activities of Daily Living. Recommended standardized assessment tools are listed below:

Measure of Function	Reference
Disabilities of Arm, Shoulder, Hand (DASH and QuickDASH)	Franchignoni 2014; Angst 2011; Rysstad 2020
Headache Disability Index (HDI)	Jacobson 1994; Jacobson 1995
Hip Disability and Osteoarthritis Outcome Score (HOOS)	Ornetti 2009
Knee Injury and Osteoarthritis Outcome Score (KOOS)	Roos 2003; Ornetti 2009
Lower Extremity Functional Scale (LEFS)	Binkley 1999; Williams 2012
Neck Disability Index (NDI)	Young 2019; MacDermid 2009
Oswestry Disability Index (ODI)	Davidson 2002; Maughan 2010; Clohesy 2018
Patient Specific Functional Scale (PSFS)	Horn 2012; Hefford 2012; Maughan 2010; Rysstad 2020
Roland-Morris Disability Questionnaire (RMDQ)	Stratford 1996; Ostelo 2004; Maughan 2010; Clohesy 2018
Shoulder Pain and Disability Index (SPADI)	Schmidt 2014; Angst 2011
Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index (WOMAC)	Williams 2012; Whitehouse 2003; Whitehouse 2008; Clement 2018
Visual Analog Scale, Numeric Rating Scale (VAS, NRS); Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale (DVPRS)	Thong 2018; Turner 2004; Young 2019; Maughan 2010; Farrar 2001; Polomano 2016; Nassif 2014

MT-2.3: Mental Health Considerations

Referral to a qualified mental health professional is required when there are signs of an unmanaged behavioral health disorder. Immediate referral to a counselor or helpline is required if there are ANY indications of thoughts or plans for self-harm. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours every day at 1-800-273-8255.

MT-3.0: Clinical Considerations for Non-Musculoskeletal Conditions

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MT-3.1: Included Conditions

- Submitted information must show that Massage Therapy Services are primarily and directly focused on care for one of the following non-musculoskeletal conditions:
 - ◆ Cancer Pain
 - ◆ Fibromyalgia

MT-3.2: Recommended Standardized Assessments

- Standardized assessment tools are used to assess and track changes in symptoms and/or condition status. Recommended standardized assessment tools are listed below:

Assessment	Reference
Quality Of Life Questionnaire Core 30 (QLQ-C30)	Aaronson 1993
Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire (FIQ)	Williams 2011; Bennett 2009
Patient Specific Functional Scale (PSFS)	Horn 2012; Hefford 2012; Maughan 2010; Rysstad 2020
Visual Analog Scale, Numeric Rating Scale (VAS, NRS); Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale (DVPRS)	Thong 2018; Turner 2004; Young 2019; Maughan 2010; Farrar 2001; Polomano 2016; Nassif 2014

MT-3.3: Condition Specific Considerations

Cancer Pain

- Massage Therapy Services for **cancer pain** must be an adjunct to a comprehensive treatment program as directed by the oncologist and cancer care team. Confirmation of appropriate medical co-management is required. Dates of previous and upcoming surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation treatments should also be noted as this information affects expectations for results of care with Massage Therapy Services. While adjunctive Massage Therapy Services may ease symptoms during a cancer treatment program, it is not an equivalent or replacement for any aspect of the standard cancer treatment program. Please consult the health plan in cases of hospice care or inpatient services, as eviCore does not manage inpatient services.

Fibromyalgia

- Massage Therapy Services requests for **fibromyalgia** must include confirmation of medical diagnosis. Accurate diagnosis is important because fibromyalgia symptoms may occur in many other physical disorders which require diagnosis and care beyond massage therapy.

MT-3.4: Mental Health Considerations

Referral to a qualified mental health professional is required when there are signs of an unmanaged behavioral health disorder. Immediate referral to a counselor or helpline is required if there are ANY indications of thoughts or plans for self-harm. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours every day at 1-800-273-8255.

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