

Tap Topicals for Pain Management

by Brandi Schlossberg

Massage therapists work hard to ensure each client receives the best possible care. Giving a great massage often equates to easing the aches and pains, tension and stress that plague so many people. Primarily, massage therapists use their hands to effect such

How they work

Topical products are formulated to bring a warming or cooling sensation to those parts of a client's body where there is tension or pain. These warming or cooling sensations can help decrease pain by overriding "pain signals" that may be coming from an aching area of your client's body.

"Topical analgesics are very effective in helping to manage pain by decreasing the pain sensations reported to the central nervous system," says Whitney Lowe, director of the Orthopedic Massage Education & Research Institute and a massage therapist for more than 20 years. "The reduction in pain signals helps decrease muscle tightness and is even further enhanced with massage.

"The combination of soft-tissue manipulation and the physiological effects of topical analgesics," he adds, "is a powerful combination for pain management for your clients."

How to choose

The type of topical you choose should depend on the nature of the client's pain, as

well as your own protocol for pain management. In general, experts recommend a warming topical for chronic pain and a cooling topical for more acute conditions.

"Choosing the correct topical can have an incredible effect on a manual therapist's approach to pain management," says James Waslaski, a massage therapist, author and educator who focuses on orthopedic and sports massage. "In chronic cases of pain, due to short muscle groups overpowering their long or weak antagonists, I think a warming topical is best to enhance soft-tissue balancing.

"However, if there is any form of inflammation," he

continues, "or if the pain receptors are firing, cold is the topical of choice."

Create a pain-management protocol

To determine the best plan for pain management, including what type of topical to use, communicate with your client. Use an intake form, and consider adding a body chart so your clients can mark their "trouble spots." The more questions you ask and assessments you perform, the more likely you are to create the proper pain-management protocol.

"Massage therapists need to take a good client history, do good functional assessment and special orthopedic testing to determine the cause of each pain pattern," says Waslaski, who was inducted into the Massage Therapy Hall of Fame in 2008. "Usually, the cause of pain is totally different than where the client has symptoms.

"We should focus on lengthening short muscle groups and relaxing weak, inhibited muscle groups throughout the body," he adds. "Too many therapists treat the painful symptom prior to addressing the underlying cause."

According to CG Funk, vice president of industry relations and product development for Massage Envy Franchising, the pain clients present with can span the spectrum, from neck and back pain to headaches and fibromyalgia.

In order to serve those Massage Envy clients struggling with acute or chronic pain, the franchise developed a new service called "Deep Heat Relief Muscle Therapy," which involves the use of a warming topical during the massage. A cooling topical is applied at the end of the session, to further decrease client tension and pain.

"This upgrade service is designed for clients who desire a deeper massage and is ideal for those who suffer from chronic pain from athletic training, repetitive movements or overuse," Funk says. "This medium is really effective when performing deeper massage, including myofascial work, trigger-point therapy and sports massage."

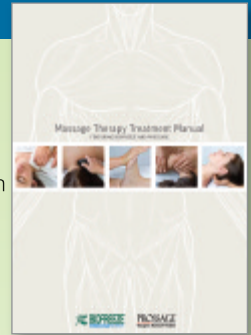
Expand your treatment benefits

To help extend the benefits of a pain-management protocol beyond the walls of your practice, consider retailing warming and cooling topicals to your clients for use at home. By offering this additional service, your business stands to benefit right along with your clients.

"As a compassionate therapist, I would be doing my clients an injustice not to offer quality products that enhance their quality of life between therapy sessions," Waslaski says. "As an entrepreneur, having multiple sources of income is simply a wise business decision."

Build Your Practice with Pain-Management Protocols

With the new Performance Health Massage Therapy Treatment Manual in hand, therapists can extend their services with safe and effective massage treatments using Biofreeze® Pain Reliever and Prossage® Heat. This exceptional treatment manual includes modalities ranging from pain-relieving practices to sports massage to deep-tissue stone treatments, as well as a self-care series, retailing tips and a resource reference.




Biofreeze Pain Reliever is a topical analgesic that delivers the therapeutic benefits of cryotherapy in an effective, convenient-to-use formula. Prossage Heat was developed to assist in performing deep-tissue work in a targeted area.

The treatments outlined in the manual were designed by professional massage therapists with experience using Biofreeze and Prossage products. "I'd like to thank the distinguished industry experts that contributed to this manual," states Jeff Mathers, product manager for Performance Health. "Because of their input and effort, I'm confident that this manual will become an indispensable tool for even the most experienced therapist."

The contributing authors are James Waslaski, L.M.T.; Michael McGillicuddy, L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B.; Teresa M. Matthews, L.M.T., C.P.T.; Bruce Baltz, L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B.; and Lynda Solien-Wolfe, L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B.

In addition to expanding their practice with new services and protocols, therapists can increase revenue by selling Biofreeze products. "After experiencing the benefits of Biofreeze, we know clients welcome and appreciate the opportunity to purchase the product from the therapist," says Mathers. "Our Build Your Practice program makes selling our products simple and rewarding. This program includes free sampling, countertop displays, event sponsorships, a patient education DVD and a Where-to-Buy online locator service."

Therapists can view the new Massage Therapy Treatment Manual at www.biofreeze.com. A free printed copy of the manual is available to registered Where-to-Buy members by simply logging into their account at www.biofreeze.com/loginGIRR.aspx. Those who are not registered can do so at this same Web address. 

For more information, visit www.biofreeze.com and www.prossage.us, or call (800) 246-3733.



"Topical analgesics are very effective in helping to manage pain by decreasing the pain sensations reported to the central nervous system." —Whitney Lowe

healing; however, faster, stronger and longer-lasting results may be achieved by massage therapists who mix topicals into their protocol for pain management.

"Obviously, as a massage therapist I want to do everything I can with my hands, but you can only do so much," says Michael McGillicuddy, owner and director of the Central Florida School of Massage Therapy and a massage therapist for more than 25 years. "Topicals give you that extra option, to make your clients feel even better when they leave the session."