

So You Want To Become A Massage Therapist

By Kathy Duncan

Interested in a career in Massage Therapy? If you think that it seems like a caring, compassionate career in the health care field, you are right. I have been a Massage Therapist for over 30 years and I can attest to the joy of bringing relief to people that are suffering. I can attest to the many other benefits too. You can work for yourself, and set your own hours. You can make an average of \$40.00 to \$80.00 per hour. You can work in a resort environment while enjoying the lifestyle on your days off. And, you will meet a lot of health conscious people.

I can also attest to the pain and exhaustion of being a Massage Therapist in a resort environment. In a town like Aspen, Colorado, the Massage business cranks up in the winter time with bookings from dawn until dusk, then slows to nearly no business when the off-season hits in May. You need to carefully budget for the few very slow months.

Most states govern Massage Therapy licensing. Generally, a license requires from 500-1,000 hours of training including Anatomy, Physiology, Kinesiology (or Functional Anatomy,) Pathology, Professional Ethics, Practical Training, and some internship or clinical practice, or a similar variation of these classes. The cost of training can be anywhere from \$5,000-\$10,000 or more depending on the school that you choose. There are some famously outstanding schools like the Boulder College of Massage in Boulder, Colorado, or Mueller in San Diego, California. These schools hold esteem to some employers, so their tuition might be a little higher. Most massage schools have a payment plan or a scholarship program.

Once certified by your particular program, you will need to decide if you want to become Nationally Certified. Some states honor the National Certification exam and will issue your state license with proof of National Certification. Some states will require you to take their state licensing exam regardless. You will need to check with the Massage Licensing Board in your own state.

Practitioner's Liability Insurance is around \$125-\$150 per year. That's it! You're then ready to make decisions as to how you wish to practice. Most newly certified therapists choose to begin their career in a public environment like a health club or beauty salon. They can gain confidence and experience in a safe and supervised setting. The facility does the scheduling and provides the table, sheets, and oil, but still require you to provide your own Liability Insurance.

If you choose to practice privately, you will need to begin with a business budget to study exactly how many hours that you will need to work in order to pay your expenses. Massage is heavy work. Studies show that the average life span of a massage career is only three years. I know from experience that you can go for many more than that, but make no mistake about it,

this is heavy work and requires a practitioner to remain strong and fit in order to prevent overuse injuries. An injured therapist cannot fully deliver effective therapy.

You will need to budget for a massage table, preferably portable, so that you can have it in your office, or at your home. It's always nice to be able to give a massage to a friend or neighbor in your own home-office environment, rather than a business location. You will need several sets of sheets, somewhere to launder them, oil and lotion, business supplies (client notes, files, phone, computer,) wardrobe, robes, towels, continuing education classes, insurance, and office rent. Also, being self-employed, you will need to keep your own tax records, so you will need to budget for an accountant, or an accounting software program for your computer.

There are many options in private practice that do not require for you to work for a health club or resort. There are many co-op situations where therapists office-share. You can join a co-op like this that pays a receptionist/scheduler, and you come in to work on your clients, and pay a monthly fee to the co-op for the space rent and the services.

Many large hotels lease out their massage rooms in the spa area to private therapists. This is a good way to go as they have built-in spa customers in their hotel guests. There are many arrangement options in who does the bookings, and who provides linens.

Another option is a Doctor or Chiropractor's office. These professionals already have the clients and the space. They generally do the insurance billing, and pay the therapist when they are paid. If you are licensed by your state, you will have a license number that will allow for you to do your own insurance billing, as well.

For much more information about a career in Massage Therapy, I would recommend that you go to the American Massage Therapy Association website at www.amtamassage.org to find information on a credible school or therapist near you.