Palpation, The Art Of Touching

With a side bar into friction*

*Massage Therapy by Salvo, Elsevier

Palpation Hints

Making Contact

Relaxed hands allow contours, temperature and structures to come easily into awareness. You may wish to close your eyes to increase awareness.

Working Hard vs. Working Smart

Working Hard vs. Working Smart

Less Is More

Rolling and Strumming

Movement and Stillness
Movement as a Palpation Tool

Active - slow and smooth, identifies muscles and contracted/relaxed tissue
Passive - feel barriers and binds
Active resistive - distinguish lengths, shapes and edges of different muscles/tendons.

When in Doubt, Ask the Body

Follow the object to its anchors and note changes when moving.

Three Principles of Palpation

• Move slowly
• Avoid excessive pressure
• Focus, or be present
• Also practice on yourself

Exploring the Textural Differences of Structures

Skin

Can tell us the most about what is going with the body

Incorporate the 4 “T’s” of palpation

✓ Temperature
✓ Texture
✓ Tone
✓ Tenderness
Explore Your Fascia
Slippery, compressible
Superficial, deep to the skin
Deep, surrounds muscle bellies
Retinaculum
An extension, or thickening of deep fascia
Holds down tendons
Transverse fibers perpendicular to deeper tendons

Muscle
Muscle is firm, yet pliable when relaxed.
- Skeletal muscle is striated
- Muscle fibers are directional
- Skeletal muscle can be contracted or relaxed.
- Tension in muscle tissue can also change the tissues around it

Muscle
Let's palpate our own biceps brachii.
Can you follow the muscle to its tendons near the origin and insertion?
Can you distinguish the muscle's parallel fibers?
What do you feel when you change the tension?
Tendon
Smooth tough and resilient
Often cable like
Will change tension when the muscle it is involved with contracts/relaxes

Ligament
Connects bone to bone
Will keep tension even throughout movements of the associated joint.

Artery and Vein
Arteries have muscular walls, strong pulse
Veins are collapsible, faint pulse

Bursa
Fluid filled “little purses”
Often not palpable unless inflamed

Nerve
Best not to try and palpate.
Why?

Lymph Node
What lymph nodes are you most familiar with?
Touch

• Medium of massage
• Powerful tool, full of meaning and intention
• Beginning and ending touch very important

• Consciously sought goal or desired end
• All other elements are dependent on intention
• Our intention can alter the result of the massage session
• Be willing to listen, feel, and respond
• Create a session that is client focused and experience led
• Should you trust what you feel?

Pressure and Depth

• Pressure is application of force applied to client’s body
• Depth equals the distance traveled into the body’s tissues, achieved through the application of pressure
• Hands, elbows, forearms, and tools are used to apply pressure
• Pressure may also be applied with the knees or feet
Pressure and Depth

• Too much pressure can lead to muscle guarding and will lessen the effectiveness of the work
• Never apply heavy pressure on delicate or thin-tissue areas
• Observe client’s facial expressions, breathing patterns, or any other messages of discomfort for signs that too much pressure is being used

Direction

• Down and forward (effleurage)
• Inward and up (pétrissage)
• Downward, back and forth (friction)
• Direction of pressure can make the difference when locating trigger points

Friction

• Rubbing one surface over another
• Often used to increase circulation in ligaments and tendons
• Applied with palms, thumbs, fingers, or elbow
• Choice of variations ranges from general to specific and depends on intent and size of area to be treated
• The idea of friction is to **Stimulate, Circulate and Separate.**
• General applications include superficial warming friction, rolling and wringing
• Superficial warming friction is also called heat rub
• Rolling friction best used on extremities
• Wringing friction is applied vigorously with entire palmar surface of both hands

• Deep specific applications include cross-fiber, and circular
• Cross-fiber or deep transverse friction popularized by Dr. James Cyriax
• Circular friction is very useful around joints and other bony areas
• Promotes proper scar formation

• Techniques for deep friction include:
  – Therapist slides hands back and forth over skin or to deeper layers
  – Press down or around an area or use circular or linear reciprocating movements
  – Little or no lubricant

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