

## Welcome to Le Spa Massage Academy's Massage Techniques Guide



This complimentary resource introduces you to the foundational techniques taught in our *Le Signature Whole Body Massage Course*. Designed for massage students, practitioners, and wellness professionals, this guide showcases the essential hands-on skills used to deliver a full-body massage experience grounded in both traditional wisdom and modern practice.

Inside, you'll find clear explanations and practical details for core massage techniques including:

1. Effleurage
2. Petrissage
3. Tapotement
4. Friction

Each section outlines the definition, applications, variations, contraindications, and therapeutic benefits—giving you a comprehensive reference to deepen your knowledge or refine your practice.

This guide reflects the high-quality, practical training offered in our academy courses, where real-world experience and client-focused techniques are our priority.

Let this be your first step into the professional world of bodywork or a valuable refresher on core methods used across massage modalities.

## 1. Effleurage

**Definition:** A gliding manipulation of superficial tissues

French verb “effleurer” – to brush against, to skim over or to touch lightly

**Description:**

Effleurage is a stroking or gliding technique that forms the basis of all massages where oil is used. It is generally used to start and end treatment and to link different techniques within the treatment. It allows you to apply the oil, warm the muscles and identify the areas of tension while the recipient gets used to your touch. Depending upon the speed of the strokes, this technique can be either calming or invigorating.

Effleurage should be a fluid movement with both hands, either alongside each other or alternatively with fingers and thumb together or apart. You should try to cover the whole area being massaged and mould your hands into the contours of the body to apply long sweeping movements both lengthways and across the body. Ensure that all your strokes are directed towards the heart when treating the limbs; this will help the return of blood to the heart and improve lymph drainage.

**Effleurage movements consist of the sub-categories below:**

- Stroking: Performed slowly with gentle pressure that is firm enough for the client to feel yet enough so that there is minimal deformation of the skin.
- Half rowing stroke: Place a reinforced hand (one hand place over other hand) on the tissue.
- Forearm effleurage: Applied when deep pressure is required.

(Note: avoid stroking over bony prominences and sensitive areas).

- Fist effleurage: A deep effleurage technique primarily used on well-developed or very tight muscle. (Note: avoid using any pressure with the knuckles)
- Hand after hand: One hand glides up the trunk or limb for a short distance followed by the other hand.
- Side pull: Reach both hands crosses to the far side of the client’s trunk or limb.

**Contraindications and precautions:**

- Avoid on area of acute inflammation as it may exacerbate the pain and inflammation. Avoid over infected areas, newly formed scars, cellulitis thrombus. Avoid areas of acute damage tissue such as burns or wounds or areas of gross oedema, where slitting of the skin is a risk.

- Avoid deep effleurage over marked varicosities, which may result in damage to the vein wall

**Benefits of effleurage:**

- Used to warm up the muscles and get the client used to the therapist's touch
- Used to find tension along the muscles
- Improves blood circulation and heart function
- Improves lymphatic drainage
- Aids in the elimination of toxins
- Relaxes the body and calms the nerves if applied as slow strokes



**Figure 1:** Half rowing stroke and forearm stroke

## **2. Petrissage**

**Definition:** A group of techniques that repetitively lift, roll, stretch compress, knead or squeeze the underlying tissue.

French verb petrissage – “to knead”

**Description:**

The technique for petrissage is similar to kneading bread. It uses the hands and fingers to break down tension. Particular areas or muscles are manipulated and compressed as both your hands work rhythmically. Start by slowly grasping the flesh with your hands, lift it, pull slightly away from the bone and then release. Ensure your movements are smooth and you are not pinching the skin. As this technique can be quite tricky to master, work slowly to start with and gradually move around the area you want to treat.

Petrissage is used on large, pliable muscles such as shoulders, thighs and hips and can be applied in varying pressure. Do not use this technique on delicate or bony areas. It is usually repeated throughout a massage in several different areas of the body; it is preceded and followed by effleurage to warm the muscles first and to clear the area of toxins afterwards.

#### **Sub-categories of petrissage movements:**

- C-scoop kneading: The hands are placed on the surface of skin with thumbs and fingers separated, creating a C shape. The hands alternately glide back and forth grasping and picking up and squeezing the muscle between the fingers and thumbs.
- Skin rolling: Use a pincer-like grip that places with thumb and forefinger (shape of a C) on the skin.
- Wringing: Place each hand on either side of the trunk or limb to be manipulated. The hands simultaneously glide, lift and shear between the muscles as they pass each other moving from one side of the body to the other in opposite directions.
- Broad compressions: Place hands, flat fists or forearm over a broad contact region. (PRESSURE APPLIED SLOWLY)
- Specific compressions: Using a specific surface such as the thumbs, knuckles or elbow and apply pressure to a particular surface such as muscle, tendon or connective tissue.

#### **Contraindications and precautions:**

Avoid confirmed or suspected thrombophlebitis, thrombosis or moderate to severe varicosities. Use with caution when applied over hypertonic (spasm) hypotonic (atrophic muscle) muscles or over osteoporotic bone.

#### **Benefits of Petrissage:**

- Helps to release muscle tension
- Improves blood and lymph circulation
- Speeds the elimination of waste products such as lactic acid
- Improves nutrient absorption through muscle cells



**Figure 2:** C-scoop and Wringing

### 3. Tapotement or Percussion

#### **Definition:**

Use your hands to repeated lightly or firmly, rhythmical striking manipulation of the superficial and deep tissues that is followed by a quick rebound

French verb tapotement means – “to tap”

#### **Description:**

Just like playing a percussion instrument such as a leather-skin drum, the hands apply a rhythm or beat to the body. Such percussive rhythms may be applied using the palms, ulnar surface of the hands, the fists or even ‘cupped’ and curved fingers. The hands usually strike the body ultimately, and the elbow performs small bending and straightening movements whilst the wrists are kept relaxed throughout the movement. When performing these techniques, ensure excessive movement does not occur at the wrists, as this may lead to wrist strain. The repeated striking of the tissue with percussive strokes serves to stimulate the underlying tissue, yet also includes a reflexive response on the whole body. Due to this stimulating effect, tapotement manipulations are often omitted during a relaxation massage sequence.

#### **Five main types of tapotement:**

- Hacking or chopping: With your palms facing each other and fingers slightly open, quickly strike the body with alternate hands, keeping the movements relaxed and bouncy. Gradually build into a more invigorating pace.
- Cupping is a similar technique used with your hands slightly rounded to form the shape of cups. It is particularly efficient as it creates a vacuum on the skin as the hands move briskly off the body (with air)



- Tapping is a similar technique used with your finger pads and the hands or fingers moving briskly on the body (without air)
- Pummelling or Pounding: is the same as hacking only done with loose fists
- Beating is the same as pounding only done with fists facing down (back of fist facing up)

#### **Contraindications and precautions:**

- Tapotement should not cause the client pain or discomfort, post treatment erythema (reddening of the skin) and client discomfort is considered poor application of technique.
- Avoid in the early stages of injury repair and refrain from use on bony areas such as the head, neck, back of the knee or on the spine.
- Avoid over areas where muscle bulk is lack such as the kidney area and over the lower and floating ribs. And use caution when applying over areas of hypersensitivity.

#### **Benefits of Tapotement:**

- Stimulates circulation
- Stimulates the skin and muscles through a reflex from nervous response. The stronger the percussion, the stronger the effect.
- Enhances deep relaxation if performed for prolonged periods (more than 30 seconds).
- Stimulates the muscle fibre formation.
- Improves cell activity.



**Figure 3:** Cupping and Hacking

#### 4. Friction

**Definition:** A specific, repetitive, non-gliding technique where superficial tissues are moved over the underlying structures. Produces improve mobility, increase local blood flow and decreased pain.

Latin verb fricto – “to rub”

**Description:** Friction manipulations are most commonly performed in a linear or circular pressure. This is a deep pressure with the palms, thumbs, fingers and fingertips, knuckles, forearm or even the elbow applied to localised areas of knottiness or scar tissue. Start by placing the pads of your thumbs or your fingertips on the area concerned and apply a firm pressure, using your bodyweight to help you. Slowly trace small circles in a rubbing movement. Work a small area, trying to break down the tension before moving on. You could try moving your thumbs/fingers up and down or just apply static pressure.

Great sensitivity is needed when using friction; it is important to get feedback from your recipient. You should never go in too deep, work too fast or spend too long on an area as pain and bruising may be caused. Friction must always be followed by effleurage to clear the area of toxin and relax the muscle.

#### **Two main friction techniques:**

- Linear friction or longitudinal friction: place fingertips, palms or elbow of the hand on the tissue to be manipulated
- Using deep pressure gliding along the direction of the muscle in straight line. If deeper pressure is required, the therapist could use their elbow
- Circular friction: Performed with the three middle fingertips or thumb. Apply obliquely into tissue with slow movement at the beginning and moving in circles, increasing depth with each successive movement.

#### **Contraindications and precautions:**

- Avoid using on acutely inflamed tissue, where acute signs and symptoms such as heat, redness, pain, spasm and oedema should be resolved before its application.
- Avoid using over acute muscle tears, haematomas calcifications and peripheral nerves
- Avoid using over skin diseases such as acute dermatitis and psoriasis
- Caution when applying friction manipulation to the tissues of unsuitable joints as this may exacerbate the condition

- Caution when treating clients with osteoporosis

**Benefits of Friction:**

- Improves the circulation to specific area
- Mobilises the superficial tissue over and underlying structures for the purpose of improving mobility
- Breaks down area of scar tissue and muscle tension
- Helps realignment of healing tissue
- Stimulates the muscle cells activity
- Reduces pain

