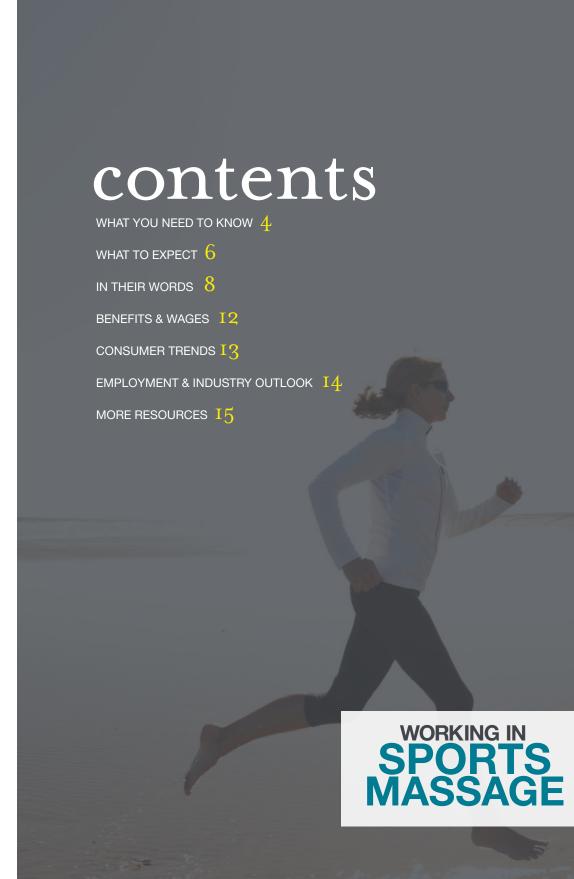


SPORTS MASSAGE

AMTA CAREER SUCCESS SERIES



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

From teams who enlist a traveling massage therapist to weekend warriors seeking to ease post-event muscle strain, there are many opportunities for massage therapists who are looking to specialize in treating athletes.

With increased knowledge and research about the therapeutic benefits of massage, acceptance of the belief that regular massage therapy can aid in an athlete's recovery, rehabilitation and performance continues to grow ... and that's great news for both new and experienced massage therapists alike.

From the environments you'll encounter to the importance of a sound and thorough education, this guide contains the information you'll need to help decide if working in a sports massage setting could be the right fit for you.

EDUCATION

Along with your standard massage education (most programs require a minimum of 500 hours), a better-than-average understanding of anatomy and physiology along with kinesiology, pathology and orthopedic assessment will be expected. You should know the principles of the rehabilitation process and where massage can be most beneficial within that process. Another key to working with athletes is the ability to quickly and accurately assess the problem while knowing how massage should be integrated to enhance the overall treatment program for the athlete.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

In addition to massage skills, you will need to understand the role of the other health care practitioners that will be working with the athlete. These might include athletic trainers, physiotherapists, nutritionists and physicians. You'll need to be able to communicate with the health care team members and physicians using the correct anatomic terminology. Understand the difference between sprain and strain, for example.

integrated at the clinic or with the team already. Become familiar with the standard treatment protocols already used in the athletic clinic where you'd like to practice and identify how massage can easily be integrated into those processes.

Just like any work environment, effective communication is key to overall success, but, more specifically, you should be able to speak the same language as the athletic trainer and all involved in the sport. Research has shown that, when it comes to exercise, massage has many benefits, including reduced muscle tension, increased range of motion, improved soft tissue function and reduced swelling.

Be confident in your skills as a massage therapist in addition to the proven positive effects that massage therapy can have in improving an athlete's performance.
Be prepared to explain this connection to other members of the sports health care team.

ATHLETES VS. NON-ATHLETES

Many massage therapists enjoy working with athletes because they tend to have a keen awareness of their bodies. What's more, elite athletes tend to be in top-notch physical condition, and the injuries they have are usually recent, making it easier for the therapist to pinpoint what's causing pain or discomfort. They are receptive to the plan the therapist develops and more likely to do the in-between "homework" recommended by the therapist. Athletes are wired to push themselves to the limits, so be prepared to

push yourself, too. However, watching an athlete achieve his or her performance goals can be quite rewarding for the therapist who played an important role in readying the athlete for competition.

UNDERSTAND THE SPORT

In addition to anatomy and physiology, massage therapists must also have a thorough understanding of the sport they want to work within. Familiarize yourself with the training regimen, competitive practices of the sport and common massage modalities used so you'll be prepared to ask the right questions.

Study up before you begin working with any team or group of athletes: What are the common injuries associated with the sport? How does the athlete use his or her body? What are the overstressed areas? Be able to accurately identify the muscles and other areas of the body you're going to be referencing. This is where your courses in anatomy and physiology come into play.

STAY CURRENT WITH RESEARCH

Keeping up-to-date with research is an important aspect of sports massage, particularly because establishing credibility is key when hoping to develop professional relationships. Read the research and journals that other sports health care professionals read, and focus your attention on the well-supported benefits of massage therapy.

Knowing the Benefits

Those who participate in exercise programs, as well as athletes in training, can benefit from massage therapy.

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT MASSAGE THERAPY CAN:

- --- Reduce muscle tension
- --- Help athletes monitor muscle tone
- ---> Promote relaxation
- ---> Reduce muscle hypertonicity
- --- Increase range of motion
- ---> Improve soft tissue function
- Support recovery from the transient immunosuppression state
- Support the recovery of heart rate variability and diastolic blood pressure after high-intensity exercise
- Decrease muscle stiffness and fatigue after exercise
- --- Decrease delayed onset muscle soreness
- Reduce serum creatine kinase post exercise
- ---> Reduce swelling
- --- Reduce breathing pattern disorders

Read more:

amtamassage.org/research

Questions to Consider:

Do I fit the general education requirements that practicing sports massage requires? Do I have an above average knowledge of anatomy and physiology? Does being part of a team of health care practitioners sound like the right professional setting for me? Am I interested in working with athletes and the challenges their injuries and schedules present?



WHAT TO EXPECT

YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

Likely, your work is going to take place in much shorter sessions than it would at a private practice or spa-like environment. It's not uncommon for the massage session to last just 15-20 minutes. And, the goals of each session might be very limited, such as to reduce spasm, pain or edema in a particular muscle group. So, you might have to adjust how you think about your work, moving from the holistic view of massage therapy to a more targeted perspective.

Expect long and fast-paced hours.

If you're traveling with a team, you might be forced to leave home for several weeks or even months while the team is in season. This could include both domestic and international travel. Self-care and proper body mechanics are extremely important for your prolonged success in a rigorous work environment.

Depending on the event or sport, your work setting can change drastically. If you're working outdoors at a marathon, your "work" space may be no more than a table set on grass under a tent and your climate will be dictated by Mother Nature. You will need to take into account the state of the athlete you're working on as well—strenuous events can cause dehydration, cramping and more. Know how to be sensitive to these conditions.

At indoor venues, the training or locker room might only include a small area with many massage therapists working side-by-side. You might be set up in a hotel room or other non-traditional space. And don't expect a lot of privacy—a high profile sporting event might include onlookers, such as coaches and press and even video cameras.

Many sports massage therapists will do contract work for a team in addition to running a private practice. While still strenuous, private practice provides some relief from the elements and the chaos you'll encounter at an event or training site.

GETTING THE JOB

The right resume.

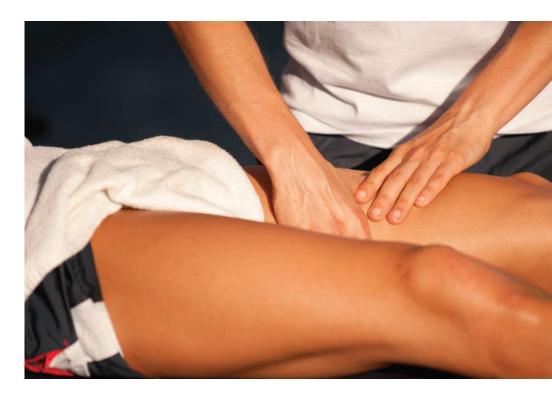
For a position with a sports team, you will want to emphasize any experience you have that includes working directly with athletes and/or at sporting events. Did you volunteer at a local 10k run or walk? Has a client ever relied on your skills to help them complete a marathon or triathlon? Add these events and experiences to your resume to help you gain credibility. If applicable, describe a specific treatment plan you developed for your client in your cover letter.

As always, include any special certificates you hold and the continuing education courses that you have completed specifically related to sports massage. Proofread your resume for errors and typos before applying to any position. Better yet, ask a peer who has worked within sports massage for ideas on what will make your application stand out among other candidates.

Making contact.

Knowing who makes the hiring decisions, as well as the other members of the sports health care team and their qualifications, roles and responsibilities, is important. Often times, it's the head athletic trainer who decides how a massage therapist will fit in with the rest of the team. Don't assume the coach is who you should approach about a position.

One way to build connections is to get involved with your AMTA Chapter's Sports Massage Team. If you're volunteering, take it as an opportunity to educate the participants on the therapeutic benefits of massage. Get your name out there and establish yourself locally as an expert in sports massage.



The interview process.

Emphasize the therapeutic nature of massage therapy. Be ready to demonstrate your techniques as well as discuss the rationale for every massage modality you use. Be comfortable discussing the desired outcomes of specific modalities. Know the specifics of the sport, muscles used and the common types of injuries.

If you can, shadow a massage therapist who works at an athletic facility for a week or longer. Knowing what to anticipate at the environment where you'll be interviewing will help alleviate some of your nerves. Unless otherwise specified, business casual dress is a minimum for any job interview.

CONTINUING EDUCATION OPTIONS

A passion for continuing education is expected in most work environments and vital to your continued relevance as a massage therapist. Check out courses offered at the AMTA National Convention, AMTA's Online CE Courses or seminars offered through your local chapter.

Questions to Consider:

Do I tend to excel when working in a nontraditional, fast-paced environment? **Am I comfortable quickly assessing a sports injury and making recommendations?** At this point in my career, do I have the flexibility to travel for long periods of time? **Do I have connections in sports massage?** Do I need to work on building my resume and experience?

IN THEIR WORDS

What's it really like working in the trenches of sports massage? What skills are most valued by athletic trainers? Read on for answers from some very experienced sports massage therapists.

LEE STANG, LMT AMTA-CT CHAPTER, CORE MASSAGE THERAPIST. WOMEN'S TENNIS ASSOCIATION

DESCRIBE SOME OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENTS YOU'VE BEEN A PART OF.

I've worked in a variety of exciting environments, including the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, the Greece Paralympic Summer Games and on the road with the U.S. National Powerlifting Team. Plus, I have worked with collegiate, ABL and WNBA athletes. Currently, I travel with the WTA (Women's Tennis Association) as part of the sports science and medicine team. In my private clinic, I specialize in orthopedic massage.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL WORKWEEK LIKE FOR YOU?

On the road with the WTA is intense but energizing! I have traveled to Paris, Madrid, Istanbul, Monterrey, Acapulco as well as sites in the U.S. The day generally begins at about 7 a.m. with breakfast, followed by a team meeting. On the first day, we cover every player as well as their individual needs before and after a match. We arrive onsite in the training room one hour prior to play—work can include anything from a quick warm-up of a shoulder to cutting tape for an athlete to prepping sports drinks or ice and towels.

Once play begins, the massages start. Players can sign up for 30, 60 or 90 minutes of specific massage. If not scheduled for a massage session, massage therapists work in the training room doing spot treatments, warm-ups and even paperwork. It is not uncommon in the middle of the week to have a few days that go until midnight, but the days fly by and it is tremendously exciting.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WORKING IN SPORTS MASSAGE?

For me, the opportunity to work with individuals who have such an awareness of their bodies is exceptional. You and the athlete are a team. Locating an area of dysfunction, aiding in the relief or facilitating improvement in the area, then watching the athlete go out and perform well is uplifting. The environment is charged. What's more, learning from health care professionals while teaching them how massage fits into overall health and wellness is just plain awesome!

Challenges include breaking into the sports arena. Often, massage is not viewed as a primary service. If you do get hired by a team or individual, the travel schedule can be daunting. Long hours, little sleep and being away from your family and business can be really difficult. Finally, the work is very physically challenging. This can take a toll on the massage therapist; exceptional body mechanics and self-care practices are essential.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER TO THOSE LOOKING TO SPECIALIZE IN **SPORTS MASSAGE?**

Expect to work hard breaking into the sports environment. Get additional training in orthopedic massage and functional assessment, clinical massage, myofascial work and stretching. Start by getting involved with your AMTA Chapter's Sports Massage Team; this provides excellent hands-on experience and each event looks great on a resume.

JERRY SCOTT, SPORTS **MASSAGE THERAPIST.** OLYMPICS & NCAA

WHAT IS A DAY IN THE LIFE LIKE FOR YOU WHEN PRACTICING SPORTS MASSAGE?

When travelling with USA Swimming, a typical day for Olympic Trials, which is a 10-day trip, usually looks like the following: Arrive at pool by 9 a.m. to start 20-minute massage sessions for athletes. Break from 1:30 to 3 p.m. for lunch and return to pool by 4 p.m. for finals at 6 to 8:30 p.m. Massage athletes after finals at pool from 8:30 to 10 p.m.

As the trials wind down, only athletes who make the Olympic team would require massage therapy sessions. A 14-hour day is not uncommon.

ARE THERE SPECIAL ETHICAL **CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH ATHLETES?**

In short, yes. An athlete's medical condition and history should not be discussed with anyone except other trainers or coaches. There is nothing the media likes more than to hear a high profile athlete is sick or injured, so those discussions don't happen outside of closed doors. The athlete is the only person who should be deciding what information they want to share. For example, I was part of the decision process to send Michael Phelps home from World Championships in 2001 because of an injury. We, as a staff, decided it would be best if he didn't complete, but it was up to Michael to tell the press and media.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF WORKING IN **SPORTS MASSAGE?**

Unlike with other clients, the results of massage therapy in a sports environment are generally immediate—you can instantly see the benefits you're providing the client. Also, you get to travel and see different places, and work with people who are motivated and positive.

Some of the challenges include the long hours and the physical nature of the work. Unless you're working for an elite team, too, the pay may also be lower than you expect.



HOW DO REFERRALS WORK IN THE **HIERARCHY OF A SPORTS** MASSAGE TEAM?

When I go to the Olympic Training Center to work, all the doctors, trainers, physical therapists and massage therapists have history charts. The doctors are in charge of the athlete's overall health, but the trainer, physical therapist and massage therapist all work together to keep the athletes healthy to train and compete. The trainers are ultimately responsible for the athletes, and the trainers will provide quite a bit of direction to massage therapists. That said, athletes are generally encouraged to get massages on their own, too.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER OTHER MASSAGE THERAPISTS LOOKING TO SPECIALIZE IN SPORTS MASSAGE?

Love to do the work, which can be hard and physical. Success doesn't come after one event, and you need to be willing to work long hours, sometimes without being paid a great deal. For example, I worked on the Indiana Sports Massage Team starting in 1989, as well as the NCAA Swimming & Diving Championships and National Championships. I coordinated massage for the 1992 Olympic Trials and was on the 1996 Olympic Massage Team for the Atlanta Olympics—the first time massage therapy was part of the medical staff for the Olympics. These were all volunteer positions, but I loved it!

MATTHEW PARKS, OWNER, MOVING FORWARD

WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION AND **KNOWLEDGE DOES A MASSAGE** THERAPIST NEED TO WORK IN SPORTS MASSAGE?

Aside from finishing a reputable massage therapy school and becoming nationally certified, I feel an undergraduate degree in a related field (exercise physiology or kinesiology, for example) is the better addition to improve the skill set for the sports massage therapist.

WHAT MAKES WORKING WITH ATHLETES **DIFFERENT THAN WORKING WITH OTHER CLIENTS?**

I think one of the biggest differences is the ability to work more specifically on target areas than just giving a whole body massage. This approach starts with more orthopedic assessment to determine which treatment is necessary.

WHAT IS A DAY IN THE LIFE LIKE FOR YOU WHEN PRACTICING SPORTS MASSAGE?

I am also a triathlon coach and personal trainer, so I mix and match my appointments every week in between massage sessions and coaching and training sessions with my clients. I typically have between five and eight massage sessions per day, four to five days per week. There are typically two sports massage sessions per day. Most massage sessions include corrective exercise review so the client knows what self-care they should perform.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND **CHALLENGES OF WORKING IN SPORTS MASSAGE?**

One benefit of being a sports massage therapist is working with a more specific clientele instead of the general population. My clients come to me for a specific reason, not just to relax. A challenge I have is reminding people that the foam roller does not replace a skilled massage therapist!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER OTHER MASSAGE THERAPISTS LOOKING TO SPECIALIZE IN SPORTS MASSAGE?

Don't be afraid to take a more intellectual approach to your massage work. Your intuition may serve you well, but sometimes there is a specific protocol for you to follow in order to improve the performance of your client.

ARE THERE SPECIFIC PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL TRAITS THAT HAVE **HELPED YOU BE SUCCESSFUL IN SPORTS MASSAGE?**

A high attention to detail is important to be successful in sports massage. I also feel my professional communication with clients and other practitioners assists with this process. It's vital to get all the necessary facts about the client and follow up with them after each session. I also feel it's important that I have experience in endurance training and racing to help with the rapport with my clients.

Your intuition may serve you well, but sometimes there is a specific protocol for you to follow in order to improve the performance of your client.

MATTHEW PARKS, OWNER, MOVING FORWARD

CYRIL WILLEMIN, **FOUNDER & OWNER. CHICAGO SPORT MASSAGE**

WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION AND **KNOWLEDGE DOES A MASSAGE THERAPIST NEED TO WORK IN SPORTS MASSAGE?**

Typically, sports massage therapists hold a certification and maintain licensure. A good option is to become board certified through the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) and have an active membership with an association, like AMTA, to keep up to date with industry trends. Exact requirements depend upon the state in which the sports massage therapist practices.

Continuing education is important to stay abreast of the evolving field of sports medicine. In addition, sports massage therapists must have a strong understanding of the demands that sports put on the body, both physically and mentally.

Because I also train and race, I feel better able to understand body mechanics including common injuries and performance goals—which gives me the opportunity to communicate and share my experience as well as my skills to help athletes reach their goals.

WHAT MAKES WORKING WITH ATHLETES **DIFFERENT FROM WORKING WITH OTHER CLIENTS?**

In addition to facilitating rehabilitation, controlling pain, reducing stress and promoting relaxation, working with athletes gives me the opportunity to be a part of their training plan and help them reach their performance goals.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND **CHALLENGES OF WORKING IN SPORTS** MASSAGE?

Being a part of an athlete's performance plan, as well as providing continuous well-being, are the most rewarding and challenging parts of working in sports massage. I live, talk and breath sports massage therapy, and I am always highly motivated because I am able to positively affect my clients' performances.



IS THERE A DRESS CODE IN THE SPORTS MASSAGE ENVIRONMENTS YOU'VE **WORKED IN?**

Since most teams have sponsors, when I'm working directly for a team in the field I wear official gear to support the team's sponsorship obligations.

HOW DO REFERRALS WORK IN THE HIERARCHY OF A SPORTS MASSAGE TEAM?

A massage therapist is a crucial part of a medical staff within a team. A sports physician usually runs the staff along with an osteopath, physical therapist and other team members. Within a team environment, an athlete always is referred by the medical staff for massages. In a private practice, an athlete can come directly to a sports massage facility.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER OTHER MASSAGE THERAPISTS LOOKING TO SPECIALIZE IN SPORTS MASSAGE?

Having a strong knowledge of anatomy, as well as being highly motivated and involved in sports, are important factors to be successful in sports massage therapy.

ARE THERE SPECIFIC PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL TRAITS THAT HAVE **HELPED YOU BE SUCCESSFUL IN SPORTS MASSAGE?**

Competing in both individual and team sports, understanding sports behavior and performance, and having a strong grasp of sport-related ailments have all been instrumental in my success as a sports massage therapist. Additionally, understanding the body mechanics of athletes is crucial in creating custom massages that provide maximum benefits.

BENEFITS & WAGES

AVERAGE INDUSTRY WAGES

On average, massage therapists working in athletic facilities earn \$59.40 per hour. That includes a \$49.65 average hourly rate and an average tip of \$9.75

SETTING	AVERAGE HOURLY PAY (excluding tips)
Health Club & Athletic Facilities: Hospital/Medical Office: Spa/Salon: Chiropractic/Integrated Clinic:	59.40 43.62 39.57 39.81

GRATUITIES

Across the profession, the average tip amount is \$12.30 However, clients are tipping more frequently—41 percent of therapists reported receiving tips 81-100 percent of the time in 2018. This has been consistent since 2015. Gratuities should be graciously appreciated but never expected.

BENEFITS

In 2018, 45 percent of massage therapists reported receiving health benefits from their employers. Benefits packages can include health insurance, paid vacation and sick time, and continuing education programs.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

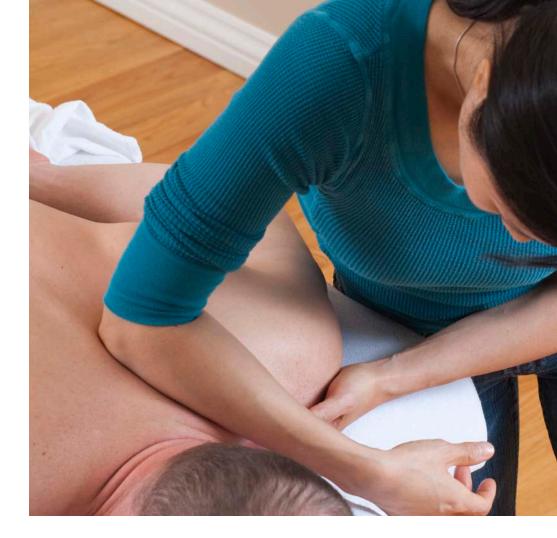
As many sports massage therapists learn, starting locally is often the most efficient way to build a steady client-base and resume. If you're just starting out, check out the opportunities to work and volunteer at local events. Even seasoned massage therapists can benefit from increased exposure.

Introducing an athlete to his or her first massage can act as a powerful marketing tool.

Continue to build and advance your skill set. Look into education programs in the type of massage that interests you most. According to the AMTA Massage Profession Report, massage therapists are using an average of seven modalities/techniques. While it's important to have a diverse skill set, specialty certificates and advanced training can help differentiate you from other massage therapists who are targeting similar clients.

No matter which direction you ultimately decide to pursue, time spent practicing massage in a sports environment can open many doors for you. A collaborative spirit along with the ability to be a quick-thinking team player will help you stand out in any workplace.

In 2018, 36% of massage therapists reported that new clients found them through participation in community or local events.



MASSAGE THERAPY CONSUMER TRENDS

SEEING THE RESULTS:

87% of consumers see massage as effective in reducing pain 86% of consumers agree that massage can be beneficial to overall health and wellness.

MASSAGE FOR MEDICAL REASONS:

In 2018, 52% of massage consumers got their last massage for medical reasons, and 5% got their last massage for sports conditioning.

RELIEVING PAIN & INJURY RECOVERY: Consumers who received massage for medical reasons cited using massage to relieve pain, alleviate soreness and stiffness, and recover from injury.

EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK >

OUTLOOK FOR THE MASSAGE THERAPY PROFESSION

Employment opportunities are expected to grow for massage therapists.

According to the most recent U.S. Department of Labor information, employment opportunities for massage therapists are expected to grow at a faster than average rate as more people learn about the benefits of massage therapy. Between 2024 and 2028, employment of massage therapists is expected to grow by 22 percent, faster than the average rate for all occupations.

CAREER PLANNING

It's always important to be thinking ahead about your ultimate career goals in the massage therapy profession. If you're still unsure about which path is best for you, gaining some exposure to different work settings is never a bad idea. If you're an AMTA member, you can leverage connections you've made through your chapter and at other events. AMTA's community of massage therapists is a great place to make the connections that can help you progress and flourish in your career.

Competing in both individual and team sports, understanding sports behavior and performance, and having a strong grasp of sport-related ailments have all been instrumental in my success as a sports massage therapist.

CYRIL WILLEMIN, FOUNDER & OWNER, CHICAGO SPORT MASSAGE



AMTA IS HERE TO SUPPORT YOU IN EVERY STAGE OF YOUR CAREER

AMTA/ NCBTMB SPORTS MASSAGE SPECIALTY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Show clients, colleagues and employers your commitment to learning about advanced sports massage scenarios and settings with AMTA's Sports Massage Continuing Education. Whether you complete the full series to earn the AMTA/NCBTMB Sports Massage Speciality Certificate or take just your preferred individual courses, this education series can help you reach your career goals.

amtamassage.org

AMTA RESOURCES

Whether you are a seasoned massage therapist or just starting your career, AMTA Resources section offers a wealth of guidance to expand or jump-start your career, including a special section for massage therapists choosing to work in a health care setting, a career path assessment quiz and other installments of the AMTA Career Guides.

amtamassage.org/careerguidance

AMTA NATIONAL CONVENTION

Network with colleagues and advance your skill set at this annual event. Access continuing education courses focusing on hands-on learning as well as the business-side of the profession, including collaboration and communication in health care.

amtamassage.org/convention

AMTA JOB BANK

Visit AMTA's Job Bank to search for massage therapy employers in your area, including health care opportunities. Or, post your resume to gain exposure to potential employers.

amtamassage.org/jobbank

AMTA'S MENTORING PROGRAM

Because of the differences for massage therapy in health care environments compared to other work settings, massage therapists considering this career option might want to volunteer or take part in an internship program sometime during their decision process. Make connections through AMTA's Mentoring Program.

amtamassage.org/mentoring

READ MORE

"Practicing Sports Massage," Massage Therapy Journal, Summer 2011.

"Massage Therapy for Those Who Exercise," AMTA Approved Position Statements 2019 AMTA Massage Profession Research Report

U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook.

Originally published in 2012. Reprinted with updated research in 2020 $\mbox{@}$ 2020

ABOUT THE AMERICAN MASSAGE THERAPY ASSOCIATION

The American Massage Therapy
Association, the most respected name
in massage therapy, is the largest nonprofit, professional association serving
massage therapists, massage students
and massage schools. The association
is directed by volunteer leadership
and fosters ongoing, direct memberinvolvement through its 51 chapters.
AMTA works to advance the profession
through ethics and standards, the
promotion of fair and consistent licensing
of massage therapists in all states, and
public education on the benefits of
massage.

More information/join: amtamassage.org

