

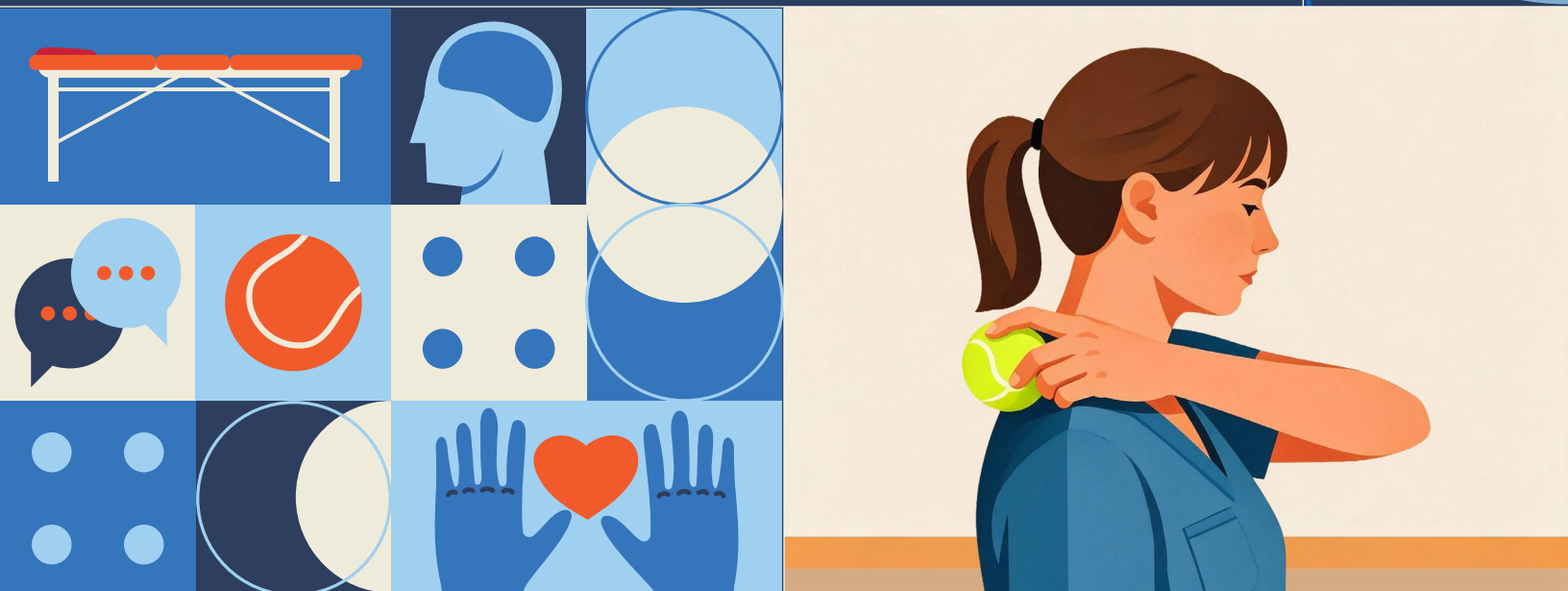


The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

TCI-MASSAGE

Self-Massage Techniques

Eight simple self-massage practices that can be used personally or shared with others to help reduce tension and calm your body.



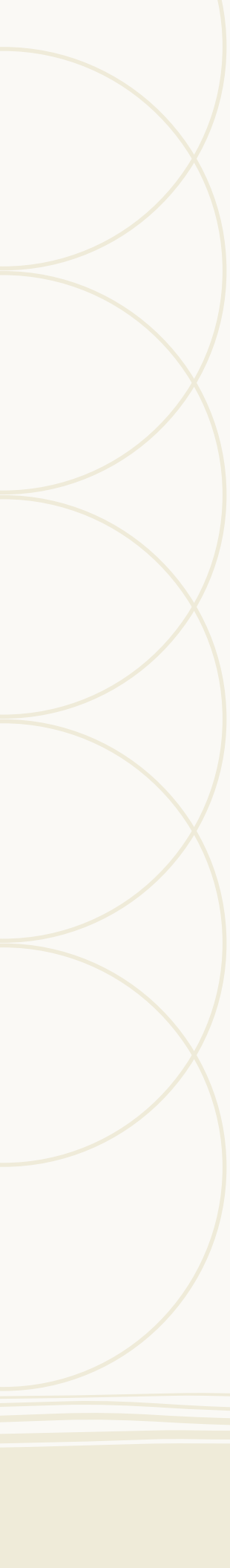


Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Scalp Massage	2
Face Massage	3
Shoulder Massage	4
Forearm Massage.....	5
Gentle Palm Massage.....	6
Back Massage with a Tennis Ball.....	7
Quadriceps Massage	8
Foot Massage.....	9



Introduction

Self-massage, also called self-administered massage, means using your own hands, forearms, or a simple tool, such as a tennis ball or foam roller, to apply comfortable pressure to your body. Many people do this naturally when they feel pain, physical tension, or stress, such as rubbing the neck, shoulders, or hands. Self-massage can be a simple way to bring attention and care to areas of the body that feel tense or uncomfortable. It may also support relaxation and help quiet the mind. Some research suggests that self-massage may help with pain, stress-related symptoms, sleep, fatigue, and quality of life.¹

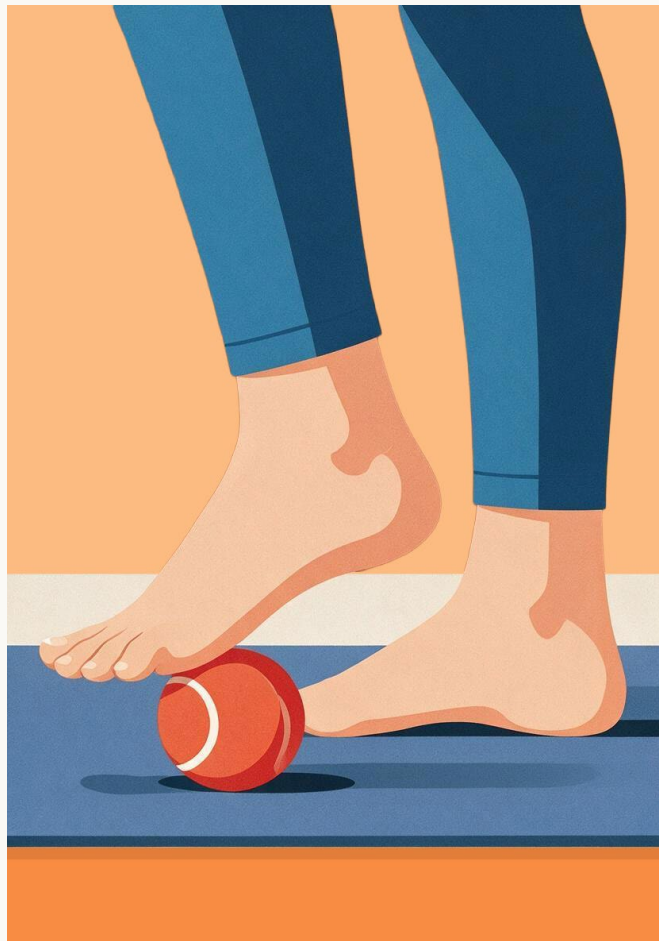
This handout includes eight simple self-massage techniques organized from the head down to the feet. Care providers can review these techniques with clients, and clients can also use them on their own.

A few safety points

Use pressure that feels firm but pleasant. Never press hard enough to cause discomfort or pain. Avoid massaging areas with injuries, bruising, swelling, irritation, numbness, or broken skin. You may use cream or lotion to reduce friction and help prevent skin irritation. Stop at any time if the technique feels painful. If you have a medical condition, recent injury, or concerns about whether self-massage is safe for you, check with a healthcare provider before trying these techniques.

Prepare your body and mind

Before you begin, find a comfortable seated position. You may want to take a few slow breaths first. One simple approach is to breathe in for three seconds and breathe out for six seconds, repeating this for a few rounds. This can help the body and mind begin to settle. Take a moment to notice where your body feels relaxed and where it feels tense. If it feels comfortable, allow your muscles to soften as much as they are able. When you feel ready, begin the self-massage techniques.



1. Nemati D, Hinrichs R, Johnson A, Lauche R, Munk N. Massage Therapy as a Self-Management Strategy for Musculoskeletal Pain and Chronic Conditions: A Systematic Review of Feasibility and Scope. *Journal of Integrative and Complementary Medicine*. 2024;30(4):319-335. doi:[10.1089/jicm.2023.0271](https://doi.org/10.1089/jicm.2023.0271)

Scalp Massage

This technique may help reduce tension in the scalp, head, and base of the skull.



1

Sit or stand in a comfortable position with your head relaxed and upright.



2

Place the fingertips of both hands on your scalp. Use slow, small circles to massage across the top of your head.



3

Move your fingertips to the sides of your head and continue making small circles, using pressure that feels firm but pleasant.



4

Continue moving your fingertips around the scalp, covering different areas as much as feels comfortable.



5

Place your fingertips on the top of your scalp to help steady your hands. Place your thumbs at the base of your skull, where the back of your head meets your neck. Use your thumbs to make slow circles in this area, using firm pressure.

Use light to moderate pressure that feels comfortable, without causing pain. Spend about 30–60 seconds on the scalp, or as long as it feels helpful.

When done, pause and notice how your scalp, head, and neck feel.

Face Massage

This technique may help reduce tension in the face, temples, jaw, and forehead.



1

Sit or stand in a comfortable position with your head relaxed and upright.



2

Place 2–3 fingertips on each temple and make slow circles in both directions.



3

Move your fingertips to the jaw muscles in front of and slightly below your ears and make slow circles up and down this muscle.



4

Place your fingertips to meet at the center of your forehead. Using light to moderate pressure, slowly glide both fingertips outward, as if you are pulling the skin to the hairline at the temples.



5

Place the pads of your index and middle fingers on the bone under each of your eyes and close to the nose. Using light to moderate pressure, slowly glide the fingertips outward along that bone toward the temples in one smooth motion and repeat.

Use light to moderate pressure that feels comfortable, without causing pain. Spend at least 20–30 seconds on each area.

Pause and notice how your face, jaw, and head feel.

Shoulder Massage

This technique may help reduce tension in the tops of the shoulders, neck, and upper back.



1

Sit or stand in a comfortable position with your shoulders relaxed.



2

Reach one hand across your body and gently grasp the muscle on the top of the opposite shoulder. This is the upper trapezius, the muscle between the side of your neck and the outer edge of your shoulder.



3

Squeeze the muscle between your fingers and palm, or between your fingers and thumb. You can briefly shrug the shoulder up to soften the tissue, then let that shoulder drop and allow the arm on that side to hang heavy.



4

For a stronger stretch, keep a gentle squeeze on the muscle and slowly tilt your ear toward the opposite shoulder. You can also slowly turn your head away from the side you are massaging.



5

Use your fingertips to make slow circles across the back of that muscle, working from the side of the neck toward the shoulder.

Use pressure that feels firm but pleasant, without causing pain. Spend about 30–60 seconds on each side.

Pause and notice how your neck and shoulders feel. Repeat on the other side.

Forearm Massage

This technique may help reduce tension in the forearms, wrists, and hands. You may need to remove watches or bracelets.



1

Sit in a comfortable position and rest one forearm on a table, pillow, or your lap.



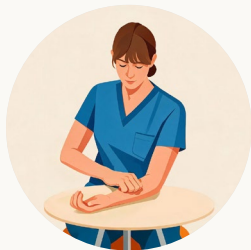
2

Use the opposite forearm, loose fist, or fingers to make slow circles on the top of your resting forearm, starting just below the elbow. Move gradually toward the wrist, using pressure that feels firm but pleasant.



3

Use the opposite forearm to glide down the resting forearm, starting just below the elbow and ending at the wrist. **You may need lotion for this.*



4

Turn your resting arm over and repeat the same circular movements on the inside of the forearm, moving from just below the elbow toward the wrist.



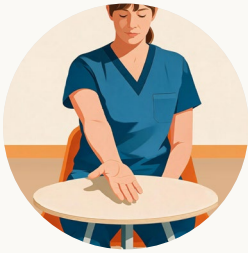
5

Optional: You can also use a tennis ball. Hold the ball in your opposite hand and gently roll or press it in small circles along the top and inside of the forearm.

Pause and notice how your forearm, wrist, and hand feel. Repeat on the other side, if desired.

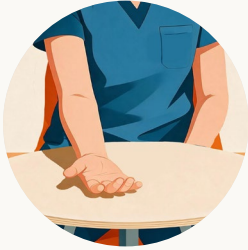
Gentle Palm Massage

This technique may help reduce tension in the hands and support a sense of calm.



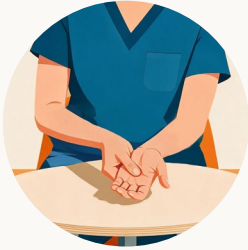
1

Sit in a comfortable position and place one hand in front of you with the palm facing up.



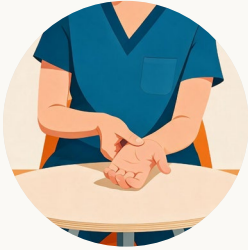
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Keep your palm and fingers relaxed.



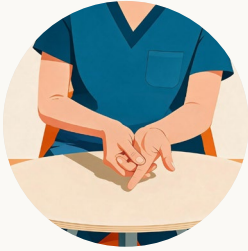
3

Hold the palm with your opposite hand and use your thumb to make slow, small circles across the palm.



4

Start near the wrist and move gradually toward the base of the fingers, covering the whole palm.



5

Then support one finger at a time with the index and middle fingers of your opposite hand and use your thumb to press from the base of the finger toward the fingertip. Repeat with each finger.

Use pressure that feels firm but pleasant, without causing pain. Continue for a minute or two on each hand.

Pause and notice how your hand feels. Repeat on the other side.

Back Massage with a Tennis Ball

This technique may help reduce tension in the muscles of the back.



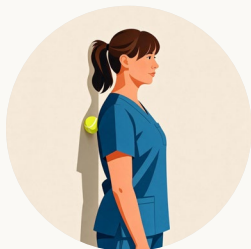
1

Choose whether to do this technique against a wall or while lying on the floor. Using a wall gives you more control and usually creates less pressure. Lying on the floor uses more of your body weight and creates stronger pressure.



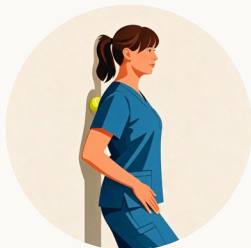
2

Place a tennis ball between your back and the wall or floor. Position the ball on an area of tension, keeping it on the muscles and away from the spine itself.



3

Slowly lean or release your body weight into the ball, using pressure that feels firm but pleasant.



4

Bend and straighten your knees slightly to glide the ball up and down to different areas. You can also gently move side to side to move the ball across the muscles.



5

Continue moving the tennis ball to different points around the back. If you have time, work across the entire back.

Pause and breathe slowly when you find a tender area. Stop or reduce pressure if the sensation feels painful, too intense, or uncomfortable.

Pause and notice how your back feels.

Quadriceps Massage

These techniques may help reduce tension in the quadriceps, the large muscles on the front of the thigh. You can try one technique or combine several, depending on what feels useful.



1

Thigh squeezing: Sit in a chair with both feet resting on the floor (or you can sit on the floor with one knee bent). Interlace your fingers and place both palms on the front of the thigh, with one palm on each side of the quadriceps. Use your interlaced hands to gently squeeze the muscle between your palms. Slowly move your hands up and down the thigh, using pressure that feels firm but pleasant.



2

Gentle tapping and gliding: Sit in a chair with both feet on the floor. Use loose fists to gently tap the tops of both thighs, like you are knocking on a door, moving up and down the thighs. Then place one palm at the top of one thigh and slowly glide down toward the knee. Use your body weight and a gentle rocking motion instead of pushing hard with your arm. You can also use a tennis ball to make circles or gliding movements over the top of the thigh.



3

Forearm presses: Sit in a chair and place one forearm across the top of one thigh. Lean gently into the thigh and make slow presses or small rolling movements into areas of tension. Hold each spot as long as it feels comfortable, then move to another area.

Use pressure that feels firm but pleasant, without causing pain. Spend about 30–60 seconds on each technique, or as long as it feels helpful.

Pause and notice how your thighs feel. Repeat on the other leg, if desired.

Foot Massage

This technique may help reduce tension in the feet and support relaxation.



1

Sit in a comfortable position on a chair, bed, or floor where you can easily reach one foot.



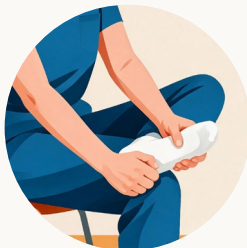
2

Apply lotion if desired. You can also keep your sock on and massage over the sock.



3

Hold the foot with both hands. Use both thumbs to make slow, small circles across the bottom of the foot, gradually covering the whole sole from the heel to the ball of the foot and the base of the toes.



4

Make a loose fist and use your knuckles to make slow circles across the bottom of the foot. Move gradually across the whole sole, using pressure that feels firm but pleasant.



5

Finally, gently squeeze and massage each toe, one at a time.

Tennis ball option: This option may be helpful if reaching your feet is difficult or if you prefer using a tool instead of your hands. Sit in a chair and place a tennis ball on the floor under one foot. Slowly roll the ball from the heel to the ball of the foot, then side to side across the sole. Use light to moderate pressure, and reduce pressure if the sensation feels too intense.

Pause and notice how your foot feels. Repeat on the other side, if desired.



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