

Practice Advisory: Therapeutic Facial Massage

Reason for Practice Advisory

The NHPC has received an increase in inquiries about facial massage techniques, including, but not limited to, buccal massage, intra-oral work, lymphatic facial massage, and Sculptural Face Lifting (SFL).

This Practice Advisory clarifies the distinction between therapeutic facial massage techniques and esthetic facial treatments, including scope of practice, liability insurance coverage, and appropriate billing and receipting practices.

Scope of Practice and Overview of Therapeutic Facial Massage

Massage therapy is the assessment of the soft tissue and joints of the body and the treatment and prevention of physical dysfunction and pain of the soft tissue and joints by manipulation to develop, maintain, rehabilitate, or augment physical function, or to relieve pain.

Therapeutic facial massage involves the manipulation of the soft tissues of the face, jaw, neck, and upper chest area to address dysfunction, pain, or restricted movement. These techniques fall within the massage therapy scope of practice, are covered under NHPC professional liability insurance, and may be receipted as massage therapy when provided for therapeutic purposes.

Examples of therapeutic facial massage to address pain, dysfunction, or restricted movement include:

- lymphatic drainage of the face
- buccal massage/intra-oral soft-tissue techniques
- intra-oral or external techniques to address [Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction](#) (TMJD), headaches, sinus congestion, or facial tension
- Sculptural Face Lifting (SFL) techniques
- techniques to reduce facial muscle hypertonicity, trigger points, or tension headaches
- soft tissue techniques for facial nerve rehabilitation

Massage Therapy Standards of Practice

Therapeutic facial massage must be provided in accordance with the NHPC's Standards of Practice for Massage Therapy. Facial massage must be approached with the same clinical and documentation requirements as any other massage therapy treatment.

Practitioners must:

- determine whether massage therapy is indicated by reviewing relevant health history, screening for contraindications, and ensuring that facial massage is indicated
- interview the client to obtain treatment goals
- perform an assessment
- develop a treatment plan that addresses the client's therapeutic goals
- obtain informed consent for the treatment plan
- maintain accurate treatment notes documenting assessment findings, treatment rationale, therapeutic techniques used, client response, and any adverse effects
- follow all other communication and public health standards, including proper draping, hygiene, glove use for intra-oral techniques, and regular check-ins to ensure client comfort and understanding

Esthetic Facial Treatments

Esthetic facials are cosmetic skincare treatments involving cleansing, exfoliating, hydrating, or rejuvenating the skin. These procedures are intended for cosmetic enhancement rather than therapeutic outcomes. Even if performed by a massage therapist, esthetic facials:

- do not fall within the scope of massage therapy
- are not covered under NHPC professional liability insurance
- must not be billed or receipted as massage therapy

Members offering esthetic or skincare services must obtain separate liability coverage through an insurance provider and must not associate these services with their NHPC membership.

Combining Services

Combining massage therapy techniques with cosmetic facial procedures may create billing and insurance ambiguity. The NHPC does not recommend providing combination services.

Esthetic services must not be receipted as massage therapy. Receipting esthetic or cosmetic treatments as massage therapy is considered insurance fraud by the NHPC and a serious violation of the NHPC Code of Ethics, specifically Non-maleficence 21: "Refrain from falsifying any part of a client's record or signing a certificate, report, or similar document."



If both therapeutic and esthetic elements are provided in the same session, **which the NHPC strongly recommends against**, they must be receipted separately:

- the therapeutic portion may be billed as massage therapy
- the esthetic portion must be billed separately and paid out-of-pocket by the client

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need NHPC-approved training to perform therapeutic facial massage?

No. There is currently no NHPC-approved course required. Training in facial and intra-oral massage is included in most massage therapy programs; however, practitioners must ensure they are competent and adequately trained, particularly for intra-oral techniques.

If a practitioner does not feel confident in their knowledge or skills, they should pursue additional continuing education to ensure safe and effective practice.

Is there an additional cost to add therapeutic facial massage to my liability insurance coverage?

No. Therapeutic facial massage is included under the modality of massage therapy and does not require additional coverage.

Can I receipt therapeutic facial massage as “massage therapy”?

Yes. If the service is provided for therapeutic reasons and meets the Standards of Practice, it may be billed and receipted as massage therapy.

Can I combine therapeutic facial massage with esthetic facial services in the same appointment?

The NHPC does not recommend offering combination services due to the ambiguity and high risk of potential for insurance fraud. If you do provide combination or blended services, you must issue separate receipts and must not associate the esthetic service with your NHPC membership.