

# Appendix C

## Medications

It is the rare massage therapist who has no clients who use any medications. Almost one-half of all adults in the United States use at least one prescription drug every month, and close to 12%—that’s almost one in every eight people—use five or more prescription drugs within a given month. Massage therapists are always encouraged to ask about what medications, prescription or otherwise, their clients might be taking. Traditionally, this question has been intended to help discover what conditions a client might have that could influence the way massage needs to be conducted. But the possible interaction between bodywork and medications themselves is also an important topic.

The issue of pharmacology in the context of massage therapy is important but challenging. When we work with clients who use medications, we must balance the intended effects of the drugs, possible side effects, and the potential for massage therapy or bodywork to tip the scales for better or worse. This is hard to predict, because we know so little about the interactions between massage therapy and medications. Here is a short list of unanswered questions about this subject:

- Does massage therapy impact the speed or efficiency of drug uptake?
- Is that impact different with oral medications, compared to other modes of administration?

- How close in time and proximity is it appropriate to work in an area where a person has used a topical, implanted, or injected medication?
- If a drug can be toxic or carries a black box warning, might massage therapy increase any risks?

Most of the time we can identify potential problems, proceed conservatively, monitor results carefully, and be helpful for our clients who use medications. In some cases, a conversation with the prescribing physician may be in order—not to ask permission to do massage, but to investigate whether the general changes massage therapy brings about carry any concern or risk in the presence of medications.

When we look at the side effects of commonly used medications, we can see a few repeated themes. Table C.1 covers some of the most relevant drug side effects, and suggestions for how massage therapy might be adjusted to accommodate for these situations.

### How to Read a Drug Reference Guide

The landscape of medications changes quickly, so information in a text like this one may quickly become out of date. For this reason, it is important to be able to use an up-to-date

**Table C.1 DRUG EFFECTS AND MASSAGE THERAPY ACCOMMODATIONS**

DRUG SIDE EFFECTS	ACCOMMODATIONS (IN ADDITION TO ACCOMMODATIONS FOR UNDERLYING CONDITIONS)
Vasodilation, enhanced parasympathetic response (hypotension, dizziness, lethargy)	Give the client time to transition back to full speed after a session; conclude the session with strokes that help the client feel more awake; attend while the client comes to sitting position in case of dizziness
Analgesia	Work conservatively to avoid over-treatment
Changes in blood sugar	Monitor client alertness carefully; keep sugar available in a preferred form; adjust schedule to do session when blood sugar is most stable
Blood clotting changes	Work conservatively to avoid bruising
Other tissue changes (thinned skin, delicate connective tissues, bone thinning)	Get information on sites of weakness; make adjustments to meet client fragility