



## FAQs Answered about Warm Stone Massage

*Would you benefit from it? How is it different from "regular" massage? Are there any safety concerns?*

Usually when "hot stone massage" or "warm stone massage" is advertised, you see someone draped on a massage table, with black basalt stones lined up in one or two rows on the model's back. Before I received my first warm stone massage one cold winter day back in 2001, I would see those photos and just shrug, thinking, "stones just sitting on the back... hmm, doesn't look all that effective or relaxing."

Anyway, I was feeling adventurous and decided to schedule a 90-minute session with a local massage therapist. After the session, I felt almost drunk with relaxation, and had to walk around the block a couple of times to return to a more alert state so I could drive home. The addition of warm stones was the difference between (a) just feeling relaxed and (b) sinking down through and peacefully releasing all the layers of tension, and becoming as one with the massage table. On the basis of this one session, I signed up for the hot stone massage class at the Massage Institute of Davis, and completed the training in January 2002, adding it to my repertoire. I have been offering it ever since, and it's one of my favorite massages to give.

### **Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Warm Stone Massage.**

Here are some answers to the questions I'm most often asked about warm stone massage (based on my training, my 12 years' experience, and current guidelines from Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals):



#### **1. What is Warm (or Hot) Stone Massage, and how is it different from "regular" Swedish/Esalen massage?**

My instructor was trained by La Stone Massage, the original source of hot stone massage in the U.S. in recent times. She taught us the basics, and put her own spin on it. (Many different styles of warm stone massage have sprung up since La Stone began training massage therapists, so the general approach of using warmed basalt stones combined with massage is generally called hot or warm stone massage. ) I believe most massage therapists use Swedish/Esalen and deep tissue techniques along with the application of warm stones.

Warm Stone Massage has the advantages of:

**-Heat.** The stones that placed on top of the draping sheet and towel, called "passive stones" provide a lovely source of deep warmth to the muscles and your core, just the

thing on a cold winter day. The passive stones remain in place while massage is done with other "active" stones.

**-Easier access to muscle and soft tissue layers.** After oil is applied, the active warmed stones are used to do the deeper work of what normally would be done by the therapist's elbow in your muscles -- without any of the sharp near-pain sensations usually experienced when receiving deep tissue massage. The heat allows the muscles to relax for better access and a more effective treatment. Muscles that might resist the elbow pressure of the deep tissue massage, relax and open to the heat, weight and skillful application of the stones.

**-Increased circulation.** Although improved circulation is always a benefit of Swedish/Esalen and other massage styles, the heat enhances that effect, promoting healing.

## 2. Are there any contraindications?

Yes. As with any heat treatment, there are possible situations and conditions when receiving any heat treatment would be inadvisable. The massage therapist should take a few minutes at the beginning of each session to check in to make sure that a warm stone massage is appropriate for you on that day. Possible contraindications include (but are not limited to):



- Fever, illness, cold (less than 5 days in), nausea, vomiting;
- Skin rash or breaks in the skin, wide-spread skin condition, inflammation, or other signs of heat, sunburn;
- Recent surgery, or chemotherapy or radiation treatments;
- Fragile, thin skin;
- Extreme fatigue, exhaustion, or weakened condition;
- Poorly managed or advanced diabetes, or other conditions where circulation and sensation is impaired, including neuropathy;
- Rheumatoid arthritis, Fibromyalgia (even though it feels good, heat can cause flares of inflammation/pain);
- High blood pressure, ulcers;
- Recent car accident (heat may worsen undetected inflammation);
- Acute systemic condition, or injuries, such as sprains, broken bones, etc.

(If older adults, children under the age of 18, or pregnant women request stone massage, it may be possible to offer it, but most likely will be a shorter session, with stones that are not as warm, and I usually require that these clients receive written permission from their doctors.)

## 3. What happens in the Warm Stone Massage session you offer?

I've changed the sequence a bit over the years to what seems to work best, and can include Reiki, along with placing warm stones on key acupressure points. Assuming that there are no contraindications when you arrive, you are invited to disrobe in privacy and lay face

down on the table, settling yourself under the sheet. I will bring water into the room for you during and after your session.

First, I will lay a towel on top of the draping sheet covering your back, and use a row of black basalt passive stones placed on both sides of your spine, folding over the towel to keep in the warmth. Next, I will apply oil to your legs, do some preliminary Swedish massage to warm up the muscles, then use a series of several warm stones.



Then it's time to focus on your back. After removing the passive stones from the back and applying oil, I'll do Swedish massage, followed by more active stones, and integrate some minimal deep tissue work as needed. You are always encouraged to let me know if any of the stones are too warm; however, this is rare, because the rule is: if it's too hot for me to hold, then it's too hot to use for massage. I then do a light spritzing on your legs and back with lightly soaped water to remove any excess oil.

After you turn over, I will place another towel on top of the draping sheet, and place large passive stones down your center line, with a large warm flat stone on your belly. A large passive stone is wrapped in the draping sheet and placed in each of your hands. Active warm stones are then used to massage your neck and shoulders, arms and legs, followed by another light spritzing to remove excess oil, and drying off. (Although I do my best to remove any excess oil, it's recommended that you wear older clothes to the session, or bring them with you to change into after the session.)

You should plan on simply resting and relaxing once you get home (for a minimum of 2-3 hours) to receive the full benefit of the session, allowing yourself to truly rest.

#### **4. Are there any safety concerns when receiving a warm stone massage?**

Assuming there are no contraindications (see 2. above), you want to be sure that:

- **Temperature monitoring.** Your therapist is monitoring the temperature of the water in the hot stone heater at all times throughout the session with a digital thermometer. Professional guidelines state that the temperature can be as high as 140 degrees, but 125 - 135 or so is recommended (and believe me, that is plenty warm!)
- **If stones become too hot, the warm stone massage must stop.** This is a relatively new guideline and makes sense. Even with temperature monitoring, if the stones become too hot, the roaster/heater should be shut off and the stones not used. This is because the core of the stones will remain overheated, even if the therapist can cool down the outer layer of the stone. In the event this happens, the session can continue with regular massage, and a price adjustment made.
- **Proper disinfecting procedures.** The stones need to have been properly sanitized. I use a 20-quart roaster oven, filled with water and brought to 125 - 135 degrees to heat the stones. (This takes over an hour.) After each session, I hand wash the stones in soapy water, adding a dash of bleach, rinse, and disinfect the roaster as well. The stones are

then spritzed with rubbing alcohol and left to air dry, and then placed back in the roaster. (These pre- and post-session preparations and disinfecting protocols are what add the extra cost to the session.) There are various methods therapists and spas use to disinfect stones, but I prefer this one because it is thorough, with no potential harm to the client from harsh disinfectants.

- **Cooler weather ushers in Warm Stone Massage Season!** I personally do not recommend receiving warm stone massage when it's hot outside, and for that reason, I only offer warm stone massage October through April). Here in Davis, late spring, summer and into September can easily reach triple digits, and there is such a thing as too much heat. However, if you live in an area like San Francisco, where the fog rolls in almost every night, warm stone massage would be fine there in the summer.

### 5. What are the benefits of warm stone massage?

In addition to the usual advantages of receiving Swedish/Esalen massage, warm stone massage offers these benefits:

- Improved circulation, which promotes healing;
- Profound relaxation and stress reduction;
- Release of stubborn knots and tension in the muscles with more ease than with deep tissue alone, with a decrease in muscular tension and pain, and warms muscles, tendons and ligaments to relieve chronic pain in these areas;
- Increases metabolism;
- Promotes joint mobility and movement;



The cold weather is now upon us, and there's nothing better than receiving a warm stone massage, then heading home, all relaxed and loose, to snuggle up in a comforter with a cup of tea and the other comforts of home.

If you have any additional questions for me, and/or would like to schedule an appointment (60-90 minutes), please contact me at [acureiki.janfiore@gmail.com](mailto:acureiki.janfiore@gmail.com) or (530) 219-0136. (Please note that I am currently accepting new female clients only, or men by referral.) And with the holidays approaching, please consider purchasing a session for a friend or family member! Please click [here](#) to see how.

