

# Indian Head, Face, Neck & Shoulder Massage

## A Step-by-Step Guide for Caregivers and Self-Care

This guide teaches a gentle, flowing sequence based on traditional Indian head massage (Champissage) combined with lymphatic drainage principles for the face and neck. It can be used to support an older person experiencing stress, low mood, brain fog or sleep difficulties – or adapted for self-care when you're the one who needs soothing.

The full sequence takes 15–30 minutes. You can also use individual sections (for example, just the scalp or just the face) when time is short.

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## Before You Begin

### What You'll Need

- A comfortable, sturdy chair with back support for the person receiving (seated position)
- Quiet space with comfortable temperature
- Optional: light carrier oil (coconut, sweet almond, sesame) warmed between your palms
- Optional: towel to protect clothing if using oil
- Clean hands, short fingernails, removed jewellery

### Creating the Right Environment

- Ensure the room is warm, quiet and private
- Dim bright lights if possible
- Turn off phones and minimize interruptions

- Explain what you'll be doing and ask permission before you begin
- Check in throughout: "Is this pressure comfortable?" "Would you like me to continue?"

## **Safety Checklist**

### **Do NOT use this massage if the person has:**

- Recent head, neck or spinal injury or surgery
- Unstable or very high blood pressure, significant heart disease, recent stroke or TIA
- Active infection, fever, open wounds, eczema or rashes in the massage area
- Known or suspected blood clots in the neck or head
- Acute migraine or severe headache (wait until it passes)
- Cancer of the lymphatic system (seek specialist advice first)

### **Adapt or skip the massage if:**

- The person has dementia and finds touch distressing (try very gentle hand-holding first)
- There is significant pain in neck or shoulders (medical assessment needed)
- The person is very frail or has fragile skin (use lighter pressure, shorter duration)
- There is recent bruising or swelling

### **Always stop immediately if there is:**

- Pain, dizziness, visual disturbance, nausea
- A sense that "something's wrong"
- The person asks you to stop or becomes distressed

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## **Understanding Pressure and Direction**

## Pressure Guidelines

- **Light pressure:** Like stroking a cat – for face and neck lymphatic work
- **Medium pressure:** Firm enough to feel the muscle beneath, not painful – for scalp and shoulders
- **Always ask:** "Is this pressure comfortable?" Adjust based on response

## Lymphatic Flow Direction

For face and neck work, remember: **always move downward and outward** toward the lymph nodes.

- From center of face outward to ears
- From forehead down to temples
- From neck down toward collarbones
- Never push upward on the neck

This gentle directional stroking encourages lymph fluid to drain toward working lymph nodes and helps reduce facial puffiness, sinus congestion and waste accumulation.

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## The Full Sequence

### Position and Setup (1–2 minutes)

1. Ask the person to sit comfortably in a sturdy chair, feet flat on floor, hands resting in lap
  2. Stand or sit behind them at a comfortable height (you may need to stand on a small step if they are tall)
  3. Take three slow breaths yourself to settle your own nervous system
  4. Place your hands gently on their shoulders for a moment, making contact and signaling the start
  5. If using oil, warm a small amount between your palms now
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## **Part 1: Upper Back and Shoulders (5 minutes)**

This is where most of us hold tension – caregivers and cared-for alike. Releasing the shoulders helps the whole body soften.

### **1.1 Gentle Effleurage (Stroking)**

- Place both hands flat on the upper back, either side of the spine
- Using the whole palm, stroke slowly and firmly from mid-back up over the shoulders and down the upper arms
- Repeat 5–6 times, establishing rhythm and warmth
- Use medium pressure; this is soothing and prepares the tissue

### **1.2 Shoulder Kneading**

- Place one hand on each shoulder (the trapezius muscle at the top of the shoulder)
- Using your whole hand, gently squeeze and release the muscle in a rhythmic "kneading" motion
- Work from the base of the neck outward to the edge of the shoulder, then back
- Repeat 3–4 times each side
- Adjust pressure based on tension – tighter shoulders may need gentler approach first

### **1.3 Thumb Circles Along Shoulder Blades**

- Place your thumbs either side of the spine at the level of the shoulder blades
- Make small, firm circles with your thumbs, moving gradually outward toward the shoulder blades
- Avoid pressing directly on the spine itself
- Work slowly; you may feel small knots or tight spots – pause and apply gentle sustained pressure for a few breaths if comfortable
- Return to center and repeat 2–3 times

### **1.4 Shoulder Percussion (Optional)**

- Using the edges of your hands (like gentle "karate chops"), lightly and rhythmically tap across the top of the shoulders
- Or use cupped hands to create a light "clapping" percussion
- This stimulates circulation and feels invigorating

- Skip if the person finds it jarring; some prefer only smooth strokes
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## Part 2: Neck (3–4 minutes)

The neck holds deep tension and is key for lymphatic drainage from the head. Use lighter pressure here, especially at the front and sides.

### 2.1 Back of Neck Effleurage

- Place both hands at the base of the skull, thumbs meeting at the center
- Stroke slowly and firmly down the back of the neck to the shoulders
- Repeat 5–6 times with medium pressure
- This feels deeply soothing and helps release neck muscle tension

### 2.2 Base of Skull Pressure Points

- Locate the small hollows at the base of the skull, either side of the spine (occipital ridge)
- Place your thumbs or fingertips into these hollows
- Apply gentle, sustained pressure for 5–10 seconds while the person breathes slowly
- Release slowly and repeat once or twice
- This can relieve headaches and neck tension

### 2.3 Side of Neck Lymphatic Drainage

**Important: Use LIGHT pressure only; this is lymphatic work, not muscle work.**

- Place your fingertips at the base of the skull, just behind the ears
- Using very light, slow strokes, glide your fingers down the sides of the neck toward the collarbones
- Follow the natural line of the sternocleidomastoid muscle (the rope-like muscle you can feel when you turn your head)
- Repeat 5–6 times on each side
- Always move downward, never push upward
- This encourages lymph drainage from the head and face

## 2.4 Front of Neck (Very Gentle)

**Only if the person is comfortable; skip if they feel vulnerable or anxious about front-of-neck touch.**

- Stand to the side or ask permission to touch the front of the throat area
  - Using extremely light fingertip pressure, stroke gently from just below the chin down toward the collarbones
  - Stay to the sides of the throat, not directly over the windpipe
  - Repeat 3–4 times
  - This completes the lymphatic drainage pathway from face to chest
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## Part 3: Scalp (5–7 minutes)

Scalp massage improves circulation, releases held tension, and is deeply calming. Many people find this the most relaxing part.

### 3.1 Initial Contact and Warming

- Place both hands gently on either side of the head, fingers spread
- Hold for a few breaths, letting warmth transfer
- This signals the transition to the scalp and builds trust

### 3.2 Circular Friction (Like Shampooing)

- Using your fingertips (not nails), make small, firm circles all over the scalp
- Work systematically: start at the hairline and work back, or start at the crown and work outward
- Use medium pressure; you should feel the scalp moving over the skull beneath
- Cover the whole head: sides, back, top, above and behind the ears
- Spend 2–3 minutes on this; it's the heart of the scalp massage
- Encourage the person to breathe slowly and let their jaw relax

### 3.3 Hair Tugging (If Hair Allows)

- Take small sections of hair near the roots between your fingers
- Gently pull outward and upward, creating a light tugging sensation on the scalp
- Release and move to the next section
- Work all over the scalp
- This stimulates hair follicles and feels surprisingly soothing
- Skip if hair is very thin, fragile, or if the person finds it uncomfortable

### 3.4 Champissage Percussion (Fingertip Tapping)

- Using your fingertips, lightly and rapidly tap all over the scalp in a "drumming" pattern
- Or use the whole hand in a gentle "shampooing" motion
- This stimulates circulation and brings a sense of energy and alertness
- Spend 30–60 seconds
- Some people find this invigorating; others prefer to skip and stay with slower rhythms

### 3.5 Smoothing and Calming

- Finish scalp work by placing both palms flat on either side of the head
- Stroke slowly from front to back several times
- Then rest your hands gently on the crown for a few breaths
- This helps the person "land" after the stimulation

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## Part 4: Face (4–5 minutes)

Face massage combines soothing touch with lymphatic drainage. It can relieve sinus pressure, soften jaw tension, and bring a sense of presence and calm.

**Use light pressure throughout; facial skin is delicate.**

#### 4.1 Forehead Stroking

- Place your fingertips at the center of the forehead (between the eyebrows)
- Stroke slowly and smoothly outward toward the temples, using light pressure
- Repeat 5–6 times
- Then stroke from the hairline down to the eyebrows, again working outward from center
- This releases forehead tension and encourages lymph flow toward the temples

#### 4.2 Temple Circles

- Place your fingertips or thumbs on the temples (the soft area beside the outer edge of the eyebrows)
- Make slow, gentle circles
- Many people hold tension here; you may feel tight, ropy tissue
- Spend 30–60 seconds; this can relieve headaches

#### 4.3 Eyebrow Pressure Points

- Using your thumbs or index fingers, apply gentle pressure along the bony ridge of the eyebrow
- Start at the inner corner (near the nose) and work outward to the outer edge
- Pause at 3–4 points along the way, holding for a few breaths
- This releases eye strain and can help with sinus pressure

#### 4.4 Under-Eye and Cheekbone Drainage

**Use very light pressure; this is lymphatic drainage.**

- Place your fingertips just under the inner corners of the eyes (where the nose meets the eye socket)
- Stroke very gently outward along the top of the cheekbone toward the ears
- Repeat 5–6 times
- Then place fingertips under the cheekbones (sinus area)
- Stroke outward from nose to ears, following the curve of the cheekbone
- This drains lymph and reduces puffiness and sinus congestion

#### 4.5 Nose and Sinus Points

- Using your index or middle fingers, apply gentle pressure beside the nostrils
- Move slowly up either side of the nose to the bridge
- Then apply gentle pressure at the inner corners of the eyes (tear ducts)
- Hold each point for 3–5 seconds
- This can relieve sinus pressure and blocked nose

#### 4.6 Jaw and TMJ (Temporomandibular Joint)

- Ask the person to relax their jaw, letting their teeth part slightly
- Place your fingertips on the jaw hinge (just in front of the ears, where the jaw moves when you open your mouth)
- Make small, gentle circles
- Then stroke slowly from the jaw hinge down along the jawline toward the chin
- Repeat 4–5 times
- This releases jaw clenching and tooth-grinding tension, common in stressed and anxious people

#### 4.7 Chin to Collarbone (Lymphatic Completion)

- Place your fingertips under the chin
- Stroke very lightly down the front of the neck toward the collarbones
- Repeat 4–5 times
- This completes the facial lymphatic drainage pathway

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### Part 5: Ears (1–2 minutes)

In Ayurvedic tradition, the ears contain important marma (energy) points and massaging them calms the nervous system.

#### 5.1 Earlobe Massage

- Gently hold the earlobes between your thumb and index finger
- Roll and squeeze gently
- Tug downward very lightly, then release
- Repeat 3–4 times

## 5.2 Whole Ear Massage

- Using your thumb and fingers, gently massage all around the outer ear
  - Work from the top of the ear down to the lobe
  - Include the small fold at the front of the ear (tragus)
  - Spend 20–30 seconds per ear
  - This feels surprisingly soothing and grounding
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## Part 6: Closing and Integration (1–2 minutes)

Ending the massage well is as important as the technique itself. It allows the person to return gently to their surroundings.

### 6.1 Full Head Smoothing

- Place both hands on the crown of the head
- Stroke slowly down the sides of the head, over the ears, down the neck and out over the shoulders
- Repeat 3–4 times
- Use a slow, soothing rhythm

### 6.2 Shoulder Hold

- Rest both hands gently on the shoulders
- Hold for 3–5 slow breaths
- This signals the end and provides a moment of stillness

### 6.3 Gentle Withdrawal

- Slowly lift your hands away
  - Step back quietly and give the person time to open their eyes and reorient
  - Encourage them to sit quietly for a minute or two before standing
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## After the Massage

## What to Expect

Many people feel deeply relaxed, sleepy, or even emotional after head and face massage. This is the parasympathetic nervous system ("rest and digest") coming online.

- Some people experience immediate relief from headache, sinus pressure or tension
- Mental clarity and mood may improve within hours
- Sleep quality often improves that night
- Occasionally people feel mildly tired, thirsty or "detoxified" – this is normal and passes quickly

## Aftercare

- Encourage the person to drink water (lymphatic drainage can increase thirst)
- Suggest rest, a warm bath, or gentle activity rather than immediately returning to stress
- If oil was used, hair can be washed later or left overnight for deeper conditioning
- Notice how the person feels over the next few hours and days; adjust pressure and duration next time based on their feedback

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## Adapting the Sequence for Self-Care

You can do much of this sequence on yourself, especially when you're the caregiver and there's no one to care for you.

## Self-Massage Tips

- Sit comfortably in a chair or cross-legged on the floor
- Use both hands simultaneously (for example, both temples at once)
- You can't easily reach your own upper back, so focus on: scalp, face, neck (especially the sides and front), ears, and what you can reach of shoulders and base of skull
- The 5-minute caregiver self-massage guide (see companion resource) gives a short, focused sequence for when you're depleted

## What Works Well for Self-Massage

- Scalp friction and hair tugging
- Temple circles
- Forehead stroking
- Under-eye and cheekbone drainage
- Jaw and TMJ work (especially if you clench or grind your teeth)
- Ear massage
- Neck lymphatic drainage (sides and front)
- Base of skull pressure points (use your own thumbs or fingertips)

Even 3–5 minutes of self-massage during a break can help reset your nervous system and discharge some of the accumulated tension of caregiving.

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## Frequency and Routine

### How Often?

- For general stress relief and wellbeing: 1–2 times per week
- For sleep support: in the evening, 30–60 minutes before bed
- For headache or sinus relief: as needed, using shorter focused sequences
- For caregiver self-care: daily micro-doses (3–5 minutes) or longer weekly sessions

### Building It Into Life

- Pair with other calming routines: after a bath, with gentle music, before meditation or prayer
  - Use it as a ritual of care and connection with an older person who may have few other sources of soothing touch
  - Teach family members so more than one person can offer this to the person being cared for (and to each other)
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# A Note on Expectations and Gentleness

This is not a cure for depression, dementia, or the wear of caregiving.

It is a soft, embodied practice that may:

- Calm an overloaded nervous system for a little while
- Support circulation and lymphatic flow around some very important anatomy
- Bring moments of kindness, presence and human connection into hard days
- Remind both the giver and receiver that the body can still feel soothed

Some days it will feel like a gift.

Some days it will feel like one more thing to do.

Both are fine.

Do what you can, when you can, and let that be enough.

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## Further Resources

- **5-Minute Caregiver Self-Massage:** A short, chair-friendly sequence for when you're running on empty
  - **Video Walkthrough:** Watch the full sequence demonstrated step-by-step
  - **The Science Behind It:** CSF drainage, lymphatics and the neck – a gentle explainer
  - **Late-Life Depression and Caregiving:** Understanding mood changes in aging and how to protect yourself while you care
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## References

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