



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

# Indian Head, Face, Neck & Shoulder Massage

*For Caregivers & Self-Care*

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A gentle, flowing sequence based on traditional Indian head massage (Champissage) combined with lymphatic drainage principles for the face and neck. Designed to support stress, low mood, brain fog and sleep difficulties – for those you care for, and for yourself.

15-30 MINUTES

CAREGIVER & SELF-CARE

NO EQUIPMENT NEEDED

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## Before You Begin

The full sequence takes 15–30 minutes. Individual sections – just the scalp, or just the face – can be used when time is short. You can also adapt the entire guide for self-care when you are the one who needs soothing.

### What You'll Need

- A comfortable, sturdy chair with back support
- Quiet space with comfortable temperature
- Optional: light carrier oil (coconut, sweet almond or sesame), warmed between your palms
- Optional: towel to protect clothing if using oil
- Clean hands, short fingernails, no jewellery

### The Environment

- Ensure the room is warm, quiet and private
- Dim bright lights if possible
- Turn off phones and minimise interruptions
- Explain what you'll be doing and ask permission before you begin
- Check in throughout: "Is this pressure comfortable?"



*Position yourself comfortably behind the seated person before beginning.*

#### SAFETY – DO NOT USE IF

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).

#### ALWAYS STOP IMMEDIATELY IF THERE IS

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

## Understanding Pressure & Lymphatic Flow

PRESSURE LEVEL	FEEL	USED FOR
Light	Like stroking a cat – barely pressing	Face and neck lymphatic drainage
Medium	Firm enough to feel the muscle beneath, not painful	Scalp, shoulders, back of neck



*Always move downward and outward – never push upward on the neck.*

### Lymphatic Flow Direction

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

- From centre 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.

### Position & Setup (1–2 minutes)

Ask the person to sit comfortably in a sturdy chair, feet flat on the floor, hands resting in the lap. Stand or sit behind them at a comfortable height. Take three slow breaths yourself to settle your own nervous system, then place your hands gently on their shoulders for a moment, making contact and signalling the start. If using oil, warm a small amount between your palms now.

## 1 Upper Back & Shoulders

5 minutes • Medium pressure

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



*Effleurage: stroke slowly and firmly from mid-back up over the shoulders and down the upper arms.*

### 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. This soothing stroke prepares the tissue for deeper work.

### 1.2 SHOULDER KNEADING

Place one hand on each shoulder (the trapezius muscle at the top). Using your whole hand, gently squeeze and release 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. Tighter shoulders may need a 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, moving gradually outward. Avoid pressing directly on the spine itself. Pause on tight spots and apply gentle sustained pressure for a few breaths. Return to centre and repeat 2–3 times.

### 1.4 SHOULDER PERCUSSION (*Optional*)

Using the edges of your hands, lightly and rhythmically tap across the top of the shoulders. Or use cupped hands for a light percussion. This stimulates circulation and feels invigorating. Skip if the person prefers only smooth strokes.

2

## Neck

3–4 minutes · Light to medium pressure

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



Thumbs at the base of the skull – stroke slowly down the back of the neck.

### 2.1 BACK OF NECK EFFLEURAGE

Place both hands at the base of the skull, thumbs meeting at the centre. Stroke slowly and firmly down the back of the neck to the shoulders. Repeat 5–6 times. This feels deeply soothing and releases 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 into these hollows and 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

**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, following the line of the sternocleidomastoid muscle. 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 – Optional*)

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



## Scalp

5–7 minutes · Medium pressure

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



*Circular friction: use fingertips (not nails) to make small, firm circles all over the scalp.*

### 3.1 INITIAL CONTACT & 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. Encourage slow breathing and a relaxed jaw.

### 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, working 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. This stimulates circulation and brings a sense of energy and alertness. Spend 30–60 seconds. Some people find this invigorating; others prefer to stay with slower rhythms — follow their lead.

### 3.5 SMOOTHING & 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.



## Face

4–5 minutes · Light pressure throughout

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.**



*Forehead stroking: from centre outward toward the temples.*

### 4.1 FOREHEAD STROKING

Place your fingertips at the centre 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, working outward from centre. 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 each. This releases eye strain and can help with sinus pressure.

### 4.4 UNDER-EYE & 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) and stroke outward from nose to ears, following the curve of the cheekbone. This drains lymph and reduces puffiness and sinus congestion.

**Face** *continued***4.5 NOSE & 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 a blocked nose.

**4.6 JAW & 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.

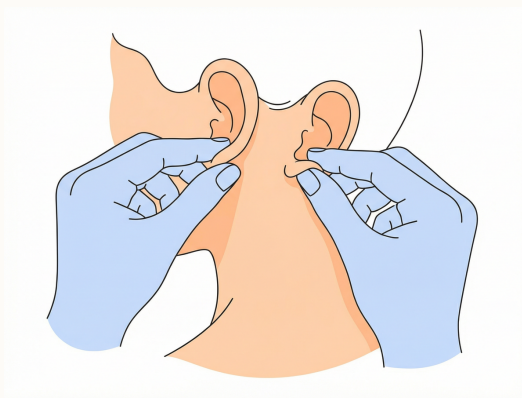
**4.7 CHIN TO COLLARBONE (LYMPHATIC COMPLETION)**

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.

**5 Ears**

1–2 minutes · Gentle pressure

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



*Gently hold the earlobes between thumb and index finger, rolling and squeezing softly.*

**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. This is grounding and calming.

**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, including the small fold at the front of the ear (tragus). Spend 20–30 seconds per ear. This feels surprisingly soothing and grounding.

## 6 Closing & Integration

1–2 minutes · Slow and gentle

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 with 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.



*The final shoulder hold – a moment of stillness before gently withdrawing.*

## After the Massage

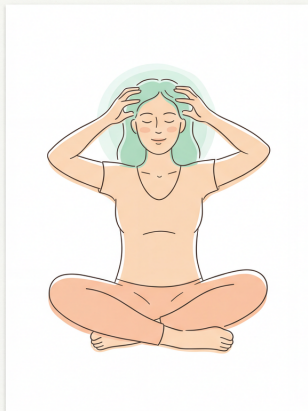
Many people feel deeply relaxed, sleepy, or even emotional after head and face massage. This is the parasympathetic nervous system ("rest and digest") coming online. Some experience immediate relief from headache, sinus pressure or tension; mental clarity and mood may improve within hours; sleep quality often improves that night. Occasionally people feel mildly tired or thirsty – this is normal and passes quickly.

### AFTERCARE TIPS

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, and adjust pressure and duration next time based on their feedback.

## Adapting for Self-Care

You can do much of this sequence on yourself, especially when you are the caregiver and there is no one to care for you. Sit comfortably in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. Use both hands simultaneously (for example, both temples at once). You cannot easily reach your own upper back, so focus on the scalp, face, neck, ears, and what you can reach of the shoulders and base of skull.



*Even 3–5 minutes of self-massage during a break can help reset your nervous system.*

### 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)

## How Often?

### GENERAL WELLBEING

1–2 times per week for stress relief and general wellbeing.

### SLEEP SUPPORT

In the evening, 30–60 minutes before bed for improved sleep quality.

### HEADACHE OR SINUS RELIEF

As needed, using shorter focused sequences on the relevant areas.

### CAREGIVER SELF-CARE

Daily micro-doses of 3–5 minutes, or longer weekly sessions when possible.

### 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.

## A Note on Expectations & 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, and remind both the giver and receiver that the body can still feel soothed.

### A GENTLE REMINDER

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.

## Further Resources

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
<b>5-Minute Caregiver Self-Massage</b>	A short, chair-friendly sequence for when you're running on empty
<b>Video Walkthrough</b>	Watch the full sequence demonstrated step-by-step
<b>The Science Behind It</b>	CSF drainage, lymphatics and the neck — a gentle explainer
<b>Late-Life Depression &amp; Caregiving</b>	Understanding mood changes in aging and how to protect yourself while you care

## References

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