

Diseases of the Digestive System

DISORDERS OF THE ORAL CAVITY

Gingivitis—inflammation of the gums.

Causes: accumulation of food between the gums and teeth; bacterial infection; overall poor health; irregular shape, size, and alignment of teeth.

Contraindications/indications: none.

Periodontitis—inflammation involving the soft tissue (e.g., gums, ligaments) and bone tissue surrounding the teeth; leads to tooth loss.

Cause: residual food; bacterial infection; tartar buildup.

Contraindications/indications: none.

Canker sores (aphthous ulcers)—small sores that develop in the oral cavity; usually have a yellow or gray center surrounded by a red border; affect approximately 20% of the total population of the United States.

Cause: unknown; influenced by emotional stress and poor nutrition.

Contraindications/indications: avoid pressure around the cheeks and mouth if painful.

DISORDERS OF THE ESOPHAGUS

Esophagitis—inflammation of the esophagus; usually accompanied by heartburn.

Causes: trauma; infection; irritation from acid reflux or ingestion of hot or spicy food.

Contraindications/indications: obtain approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork; massage of the chest and intercostal muscles can reduce the stress of the condition.

DISORDERS OF THE STOMACH AND INTESTINES

Gastritis—inflammation of the stomach mucosa.

Cause: exact mechanism is unknown; causative agents include aspirin, alcohol, caffeine, and bacterial toxins.

Contraindications/indications: avoid the immediate area of the stomach; massage of the thoracic and lumbar spine may relieve tension and anxiety; energy work could also be beneficial.

Gastroenteritis—inflammation of the stomach and intestines; leads to abdominal pain, nausea, and diarrhea.

Causes: bacterial or viral infection; allergic reaction; exposure to irritating substances.

Contraindications/indications: obtain approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork; light, clockwise effleurage to the abdomen to induce relaxation could be beneficial.

Peptic ulcers—ulceration of the mucosa lining the stomach and duodenum (occurs four to five times more frequently in the duodenum); affects about 10% of the total population of the United States.

Causes: *Helicobacter pylori* infection (70 to 80%); use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen (20 to 30%).

Contraindications/indications: massage of affected area is contraindicated; energy work could be beneficial; massage of reflex areas of the lower spine and general massage to reduce stress can also be helpful.

Crohn disease (regional enteritis)—a disorder involving inflammation of the mucosa, primarily in the ileum of the small intestine but also in the large intestine; can develop strictures from accumulated scar tissue, which leads to malabsorption of nutrients; signs and symptoms include diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea, and fever.

Cause: unknown; genetic predisposition suspected.

Contraindications/indications: obtain approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork; relaxing abdominal massage could be beneficial.

Diverticulosis—a condition characterized by the presence of saclike bulges (diverticula) or herniations, usually in the muscular wall of the descending colon; if these diverticula become inflamed, the condition is known as **diverticulitis**.

Cause: weakness of the intestinal wall, usually resulting from inadequate amounts of dietary fiber.

Contraindications/indications: gentle, clockwise massage of the abdomen can relieve the symptoms.

Irritable bowel syndrome—a disorder characterized by recurrent abdominal pain, cramps, and alternating diarrhea and constipation.

Cause: unknown; often associated with emotional stress.

Contraindications/indications: gentle, clockwise massage of the abdomen can relieve the symptoms; massage of the lumbar, gluteal, and thigh muscles can help alleviate referred pain.

DISORDERS OF THE LIVER

Hepatitis A—inflammation of the liver tissue; virus is transmitted by the fecal–oral route (e.g., eating or drinking contaminated water or milk, eating seafood from contaminated waters); usually accompanied by headache, nausea, vomiting, jaundice, dark urine, clay-colored stool, and abdominal pain and tenderness; does not cause chronic disease or a carrier state.

Cause: viral infection.

Contraindications/indications: client should be treated medically for hepatitis A before receiving bodywork; obtain advice and approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork.

Hepatitis B—inflammation of the liver tissue; considered more serious than hepatitis A; transmitted by body fluids or blood products (i.e., whole blood, blood plasma, saliva, urine, semen, tears); signs and symptoms are similar to hepatitis A; can cause chronic disease and a carrier state in about 10 to 15% of cases.

Cause: viral infection.

Contraindications/indications: client should be treated medically for hepatitis B before receiving bodywork; obtain advice and approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork.

Hepatitis C—inflammation of the liver tissue; produces the same signs and symptoms as hepatitis A and B; transmitted by blood products and contaminated needles; responsible for 50% of chronic hepatitis cases and produces a carrier state.

Cause: viral infection.

Contraindications/indications: client should be treated medically for hepatitis C before receiving bodywork; obtain advice and approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork.

Jaundice—a condition marked by yellow coloration of the skin resulting from the accumulation of bilirubin (a waste product of hemoglobin breakdown) in the blood.

Causes: excessive red blood cell breakdown; liver failure; an obstruction in the bile ducts.

Contraindications/indications: refer client to doctor before beginning any bodywork.

Cirrhosis of the liver—long-term necrosis of the liver leading to destruction of hepatocytes and accumulation of fibrous scar tissue; some areas of hepatocytes remain and regenerate, developing into nodules (i.e., cells surrounded by fibrous tissue).

Causes: alcoholism; gallstones leading to bile obstructions; hepatitis A, B, or C.

Contraindications/indications: obtain approval of client's doctor before performing bodywork; avoid abdominal massage; massage of lower extremities may reduce related edema, but be cautious because excessive fluid movement can stress the liver.

DISORDERS OF THE GALLBLADDER

Cholecystitis—acute or chronic inflammation of the gallbladder; common signs and symptoms include indigestion, vomiting, fever, and tenderness in the right upper quadrant of the abdomen.

Cause: formation of gallstones (cholelithiasis) that block the flow of bile from the gallbladder.

Contraindications/indications: avoid deep massage over the abdomen; general massage of thoracic and lumbar regions can relieve tension.

DISORDERS OF THE APPENDIX

Appendicitis—inflammation of the vermiform appendix.

Cause: obstruction in the small lumen of the appendix leading to increased pressure, ischemia, and eventually bacterial infection.

Contraindications/indications: acute appendicitis can be life threatening and needs immediate medical attention; massage is contraindicated even with minor tenderness around the appendix; energy techniques should be used with caution.

EATING DISORDERS

Anorexia nervosa—an eating disorder characterized by self-starvation, an intense abhorrence for obesity, and often an obsession with exercise; affects 20 times more females than males; has a 5% mortality rate.

Cause: very often from psychologic self-perception of being overweight.

Contraindications/indications: massage can assist in relieving emotional stress; refer to doctor.

Bulimia nervosa—an eating disorder characterized by binge eating followed by self-induced vomiting; often called binge-purge syndrome.

Cause: psychologic self-perception of being overweight.

Contraindications/indications: massage can assist in relieving emotional stress; refer to doctor.

Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are often accompanied by dehydration; vitamin, mineral, and electrolyte deficiencies; hypoglycemia; anemia; bradycardia; amenorrhea; and urinary and bowel difficulties.

OTHER DISORDERS

Peritonitis—painful inflammation of the peritoneum (i.e., the lining of the abdominal cavity).

Causes: ruptured peptic ulcer; ruptured appendix; diverticulitis; peritoneal dialysis; bacterial or viral infection.

Contraindications/indications: condition can be life threatening; client must receive medical attention before receiving bodywork.

Hernia—protrusion of an organ through an abnormal opening in a tissue of the body.

Causes: lifting; pushing; coughing; straining; congenital defect.

Contraindications/indications: do not massage affected area; refer to doctor.

Hiatal hernia—herniation through the esophageal hiatus (i.e., the opening in the diaphragm that allows the esophagus to pass through), usually by the fundus of the stomach.

Median/epigastric hernia—herniation through the linea alba (i.e., the “white line” of the tendon at the center of the rectus abdominis muscle), usually by the omentum or connective tissue.

Inguinal hernia—herniation through the inguinal ligament (i.e., the ligament connecting the anterior superior iliac spine to the pubic spine), usually by the small intestine.

Umbilical hernia—herniation in the umbilical region, usually owing to a congenital deformity.

Femoral hernia—herniation through the femoral ring into the femoral canal (i.e., the canal that contains the femoral artery).

Heartburn—pain or burning sensation in the lower region of the chest.

Cause: regurgitation of gastric juice from the stomach into the esophagus.

Contraindications/indications: do not massage the upper abdominal area; downward effleurage may soothe the stomach and abdominal muscles and reduce the regurgitation of gastric juice.

Diarrhea—frequent passage of watery stools; sometimes accompanied by nausea, vomiting, cramps, and malaise; leads to dehydration if left untreated, so plenty of fluids are essential.

Causes: viral or bacterial infection; food poisoning; metabolic disorders; irritable bowel syndrome; colitis.

Contraindications/indications: massage is indicated.

Constipation—difficulty in passing stool.

Causes: very hard stools; decreased dietary fiber; dehydration.

Contraindications/indications: massage of the abdomen in a clockwise pattern can facilitate peristalsis; use caution if client is pregnant.