23a Pathology: Medications

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Class Outline

5 minutes	Attendance, Breath of Arrival, and Reminders
10 minutes	Lecture:
25 minutes	Lecture:
15 minutes	Active study skills:
60 minutes	Total

23a Pathology: Medications
Class Reminders

Practical Exams:

- 23b Swedish: Practical Exam
  Packet A: 91-94; Packet F: 35, 45, 55, and 58
  Grader evaluated full SOAP notes with date, first and last names.
  Signatures and dates on intake form
  Bring A: 93 for grading

Assignments:

- Hydrotherapy Supplies for classes 25b, 26b, 27b, and 28b; Packet G-1
- **24a Hydro Review Questions (A: 145-158)**
- 30a Review Questions (Packet A: 141-158)

Preparation for upcoming classes:

- 24a A&P: Muscular System - Organization of Skeletal Muscle
  Trail Guide: infraspinatus and teres minor; Packet E: 37-40; RQ Packet A-151
- 24b Hydrotherapy: Theory and Technique Demo; Packet
  G: 1-14; RQ Packet A-152

Classroom Rules

Punctuality - everybody's time is precious

- Be ready to learn at the start of class; we'll have you out of here on time
- Tardiness: arriving late, returning late after breaks, leaving during class, leaving early

The following are not allowed:

- Bare feet
- Side talking
- Lying down
- Inappropriate clothing
- Food or drink except water
- Phones that are visible in the classroom, bathrooms, or internship

You will receive one verbal warning, then you'll have to leave the room.

23a Pathology: Medications

E-27

Pharmacology for Massage Therapists

- Medication Considerations for Safe and Effective Massage
- Today's class focuses on one of the most overlooked safety issues in massage therapy: medications.
- Understanding how medications affect massage outcomes can protect clients and therapists alike.

Why Pharmacology Matters

- Because the Pharmacology landscape is ever-changing, knowing and understanding every prescription drug, its effects, and potential contraindications is impossible to do on one's own; it's always prudent to refer to a trusted source for basic information.
- But always remember, when in doubt, speak with your client's physician.
- Your initial referral can be the industry standard- https://www.pdr.net/

Why Pharmacology Matters

Every Medication Matters –

Massage changes:

- Circulation
- Lymphatic flow
- Tissue hydration
- Nervous system activity

These changes can alter:

- Drug absorption
- Drug distribution
- Drug metabolism
- Drug elimination

The Golden Rule

Massage is not simply rubbing muscles. We influence physiological systems that can affect medications already present in the body.

Massage alters circulation.

Altered circulation may affect:

- ✓ Medication effectiveness
- ✓ Side effects
- ✓ Tissue integrity
- ✓ Client safety

Why Intake Forms Matter

A Thorough Intake Protects Everyone

Benefits:

- Identifies contraindications
- Prevents injuries
- Improves treatment planning
- Documents informed decisions
- Reduces liability

The intake form is your first line of defense.

Medication Screening Questions

Ask Every Client

- What medications do you take?
- Why are you taking them?
- How long have you taken them?
- When was your last dose?
- Have there been recent changes?

The timing of medication administration can be just as important as the medication itself.

High-Risk Medication Categories



Blood Thinners
p. E-34

Anticoagulants

Common Examples

- Warfarin (Coumadin)
- Eliquis
- Xarelto
- Pradaxa

Purpose

- Prevent blood clots
- Reduce stroke risk

Blood Thinners & Massage

Massage Risks/Potential complications

- Bruising
- Hematomas
- Internal tissue damage
- Delayed healing

Avoid

- ❌ Deep tissue
- ❌ Aggressive trigger point work
- ❌ Intense cross-fiber friction

Use

- ✓ Light Swedish
- ✓ Gentle lymphatic techniques

Even moderate pressure can cause tissue trauma in anticoagulated clients.

Pain Medications
p. E-29

Analgesics

Examples

- Hydrocodone
- Oxycodone
- Tramadol
- Morphine

Purpose

Reduce pain perception

Why Pain Medication Matters

The Feedback Problem

Normally clients say: "That's too much pressure."

Pain medication may

- Mask discomfort
- Reduce pain awareness
- Delay tissue response

Result: ⚠ Therapist may overwork tissues

Pain is a protective mechanism.
When that mechanism is suppressed, the therapist loses important feedback.

Muscle Relaxants
p. E30

Common Examples

- Cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril)
- Baclofen
- Tizanidine

Effects

- Muscle relaxation
- Drowsiness
- Reduced coordination
- Dizziness

Massage Considerations: Muscle Relaxants

Risks

- Falls
- Dizziness
- Excessive relaxation
- Poor balance after treatment

Recommendations

✓ Reduce stretching intensity

✓ Use slower transitions

✓ Assist client when standing

Cardiovascular Medications p. E31

Common Categories

- Beta Blockers
- Calcium Channel Blockers
- Vasodilators

Purpose

- Lower blood pressure
- Reduce cardiac workload

Cardiovascular Medication Concerns

Orthostatic Hypotension

What Is It?

A sudden drop in blood pressure when standing.

Symptoms

- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Weakness
- Fainting

Massage increases circulation and relaxation, potentially enhancing this effect.

Therapist Safety Measures

Preventing Dizziness

Before the client stands:

- ✓ Sit for 1–2 minutes
- ✓ Hydrate
- ✓ Stand slowly
- ✓ Monitor symptoms

Never rush a client off the table, especially older adults taking cardiovascular medications.

Diabetes Medications
p. E34

Common Examples

- Insulin
- Metformin
- Ozempic
- Jardiance

Purpose

- Regulate blood glucose

Massage & Diabetes

Potential Concern

- Massage may increase circulation.

Possible result

- Faster insulin absorption
- Lower blood glucose levels

Potential outcome

⚠ Hypoglycemia

Recognizing Hypoglycemia

Warning Signs

- Sweating
- Shakiness
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Dizziness
- Pale skin

Action

- Stop treatment and follow emergency protocols.

Corticosteroids p. E33

Common Examples

- Prednisone
- Cortisone injections
- Dexamethasone

Purpose

- Reduce inflammation

Corticosteroids & Tissue Health

Long-Term Effects

Can cause

- Thin skin
- Fragile tissues
- Delayed healing
- Increased bruising

Avoid

- ✗ Direct pressure over recent injection sites

Tactical Adaptations

Adapting Your Session

Clinical Thinking

Ask yourself:

1. What medication?
2. What condition?
3. What risks exist?
4. What modifications are needed?

Pressure Modifications

Safer Alternatives

Instead of Deep Tissue:

- ✓ Swedish Massage
- ✓ Myofascial Release
- ✓ Craniosacral Techniques
- ✓ Gentle Neuromuscular Approaches

Timing Matters

Session Scheduling

Consider

Pain Medications

- Schedule before next dose if appropriate

Insulin

- Avoid periods of peak insulin activity
- Muscle Relaxants:
- Avoid immediately after dosing

Physician Releases

When to Request One

- Medication changes recently occurred
- Multiple medications interact
- Medical condition is unstable
- Client safety is uncertain

When in doubt, obtain written medical clearance.

Documentation

Document Everything

Record

- Medication name
- Client disclosures
- Modifications made
- Client response
- Physician communications

Case Study #1

Scenario

- A client taking Warfarin (Coumadin) requests a deep tissue massage for chronic low back pain.
- What concerns do you have?

Discussion

- What are the risks?
- What modifications would you make?

Case Study #1 Solution

Recommended Response

Risks

- Bruising
- Hematoma formation
- Tissue trauma

Adaptations

✓ Educate the client

✓ Avoid deep tissue

✓ Use light Swedish techniques

✓ Apply gentle heat when appropriate

Case Study #2

Scenario

A client reports taking a muscle relaxant 30 minutes before the session.

Questions

- What risks exist?
- How would you modify treatment?

Case Study #2 Solution

Recommended Response

Risks

- Dizziness
- Excessive sedation
- Fall risk

Adaptations

✓ Light pressure

✓ Avoid aggressive stretching

✓ Monitor balance

✓ Slow table transitions

Quick Knowledge Check

True or False?

1. Deep tissue is generally appropriate for clients on blood thinners.

2. Pain medication can mask tissue discomfort.

3. Orthostatic hypotension may occur after massage.

4. Corticosteroids can weaken connective tissue.

Quick Knowledge Check

True or False?

1. Deep tissue is generally appropriate for clients on blood thinners. **FALSE**

2. Pain medication can mask tissue discomfort. **TRUE**

3. Orthostatic hypotension may occur after massage. **TRUE**

4. Corticosteroids can weaken connective tissue. **TRUE**

Key Takeaways

Remember

- ✓ Massage influences medication effects.
- ✓ Intake forms save lives.
- ✓ Modify pressure when necessary.
- ✓ Documentation protects your license.
- ✓ When uncertain, obtain physician clearance.

For a Deep Dive

See your packet pages for class 23A.

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