

# Complementary and beauty therapist

Straightforward information and practical tips to help you sort health and safety



**Safe Start Up**

[www.safestartup.co.uk](http://www.safestartup.co.uk)

# Complementary and beauty therapist

This guide will help you with health and safety. It gives you straightforward information and practical tips. It tells you what you need to do to make sure you don't break the law, and how to protect yourself, anyone who works for you, your clients and your reputation. It also shows you where to go to get more information if you need it.

No one is saying that being a complementary therapist or beauty therapist is a risky business. But at the end of the day, if things go wrong it's your livelihood or business that will suffer. You'll find that you already do –

or plan to do – a lot of what's covered, and much of it is common sense. Looking after health and safety is just part of managing a business well. Done properly, you could see it save money too.

## Who are we?

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health is the Chartered body for health and safety professionals. We were founded in 1945 and are a registered charity. Find out more at [www.iosh.co.uk](http://www.iosh.co.uk).

## Here to help

If you have a question, or want information on an issue you're facing, get in touch with IOSH on +44 (0)116 257 3199 or [techinfo@iosh.co.uk](mailto:techinfo@iosh.co.uk). Our helpline is completely free.

## You'll find this guide helpful if you:

- own or manage a complementary or beauty therapy business
- work as a complementary or beauty therapist, either in a salon or visiting clients on a mobile basis.

## Did you know...

One person is seriously injured at work every 17 minutes



## By law you must...

In the UK, the law applies to all businesses, large or small. If you're self-employed or an employer then **you** are responsible for the health and safety of your business. The law is there to make sure you have a safe working environment and cut down the risk of you, your staff (if you have any) or clients getting ill or injured. So, by law you must...

### ...get some help with your health and safety duties

As an employer you have to appoint someone who knows about health and safety. This could be:

- yourself, if you have a health and safety qualification, knowledge and experience
- one or more of your staff, if they are qualified or you get them trained
- someone from outside the business.

If you're not confident about managing health and safety in-house then you may need to call in some external help or advice.

Even if you don't employ any staff, don't forget that legally you have what's called a 'duty of care' to anyone who is affected by what you do for a living – from a client to a member of the public.

### Did you know...

Good health and safety saves cash: you can save £12 for every £1 you spend



### Find out more

- Find out more at [www.hse.gov.uk/business/competent-advice.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/business/competent-advice.htm)
- Download the HSE leaflet 'Getting specialist help with health and safety' at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg420.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg420.pdf)
- Get guidance on getting professional advice at [www.iosh.co.uk/books-and-resources/need-professional-advice](http://www.iosh.co.uk/books-and-resources/need-professional-advice)
- Find out about our free enquiry service at [www.iosh.co.uk/books-and-resources/the-iosh-information-helpline.aspx](http://www.iosh.co.uk/books-and-resources/the-iosh-information-helpline.aspx)
- Download our free guide on getting help with health and safety at [www.iosh.co.uk/techguide](http://www.iosh.co.uk/techguide)

# By law you must...

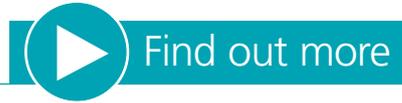
## ...write a health and safety policy for your business

If you employ five or more people, part or full time, you have to have a written policy.

The policy should describe how you'll manage health and safety. It lets your staff and others know that you have a serious commitment to keeping on top of risks as part of your business. It should clearly state who does what, when and how.

Your policy doesn't have to take you long to write, or be lengthy or complicated. Download the template listed in 'Find out more' and complete it, or use it as a guide to write your own.

Your policy shouldn't just be a piece of lifeless paperwork – it's designed to help you manage health and safety properly. It will only be effective if you and your staff are aware of it and follow what it says. You'll need to review it every now and then to reflect any changes – just make a note in your calendar, say once a year. You'll also need to see if it needs updating if there's been a major change, for example, to the way you work, or where you work.



- Download a policy template at [www.hse.gov.uk/risk/risk-assessment-and-policy-template.doc](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/risk-assessment-and-policy-template.doc)
- Look at an example of a policy at [www.hse.gov.uk/risk/health-and-safety-policy-example.doc](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/health-and-safety-policy-example.doc)

## ...manage the risk in your business

You must consider and manage any risks where you work or connected with what you do.

This is a straightforward process. Known as 'risk assessment', it involves thinking about what you do in your business that could harm people – you, your staff (if you have them) or your clients – and what you're going to do to try to stop it happening.

In your line of work, depending on the type of therapy you offer, you will probably look at things like:

- using and storing essential oils or beauty products
- contact with the body and skin
- aches and pains
- lifting and carrying heavy equipment, if you're a mobile therapist
- using sunbeds.

There may be more, but these are the main areas you're most likely to need to focus on – we look at these five in a bit more detail on page 09.

Risk assessments aren't about piles of paperwork, just sensible actions to control the risks. The law doesn't expect you to remove all risks, but it does expect you to control them. You're probably doing most of this already as part of day-to-day management – but your risk assessment will help you see if what you're doing is enough or if you need to do more.



### Find out more

- Look at templates and examples at [www.hse.gov.uk/risk/risk-assessment-and-policy-template.doc](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/risk-assessment-and-policy-template.doc)
- Look at risk assessment case studies at [www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies)
- Use our free risk assessment tool at [www.ioshroutefinder.co.uk](http://www.ioshroutefinder.co.uk)

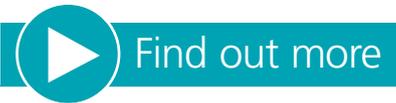
# By law you must...

## ...talk to your employees

If you employ anyone, you need to consult them on health and safety. Again, it's not complicated – you can do this by listening and talking to them about:

- health and safety and the work they do
- how risks are controlled
- the best ways of giving information and training.

This is a two-way thing. Let your staff raise concerns and give their opinions on decisions. After all, they're often the best people to understand the risks involved in their work – and talking to them about it lets them know that you take their health and safety seriously.



- Find out more at [www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/doyourbit](http://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/doyourbit)

## ...give training and information

If you have staff, they need to know how to work safely and without risking their health. You must give clear instructions, information and training. Don't forget to include temporary workers.

Training could include, for example, developing the best posture to help avoid aches and pains. Not all training needs to be formal or expensive – some training can be given in-house in informal sessions, based on your knowledge and experience. Remember that health and safety training must be in working hours and you can't charge

employees for it. Keeping training records will help remind you when refreshers are due.

Make sure that everyone has information on:

- hazards and risks they may face – for your business, cross-infection is a typical risk, for example – have a look at page 10 for more details
- what's in place to deal with hazards and risks
- what to do in an emergency.



Find out more

- Download a guide on health and safety training at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.pdf)



# By law you must...

## ...have the right facilities

Some of these legal requirements will sound obvious, but it's a good idea to check to make sure that you've covered the staff welfare basics.

You need to provide:

- toilet and washing facilities
- drinking water
- somewhere to store clothing and to change if your staff wear a uniform
- somewhere to rest and eat meals.

If you're a mobile therapist, working on different sites or visiting clients' houses, it's a good idea to keep some basic washing facilities handy, for example hand gels that don't need water or a container of clean water. You and your staff may need to take a rest break in the car or van.

You need to make sure that where you work is healthy, and that if you work in

a salon, small business unit or are based at home, you have:

- good ventilation – fresh, clean air drawn from outside or a ventilation system
- a comfortable working temperature – usually at least 16 degrees C
- lighting suitable for the work being carried out
- enough space, seating and so on
- a clean environment with bins provided for rubbish.

If you own your salon or practice premises, you need to keep your workplace safe by:

- maintaining and servicing the premises and work equipment
- having windows that can be opened and cleaned safely
- making sure that any glass, Perspex or plastic panels in doors or walls are protected or made of

toughened safety material, if they are in areas where members of the public have access and could be affected if there were an accident – you may need to get advice on this.

If you rent, make sure your landlord provides you with safe premises, for example, checking a gas boiler and letting you have a copy of the safety certificate. You'll need to clarify your role with your landlord, especially what's expected of you in terms of building upkeep. You'll obviously have responsibility for your own equipment.

You also need to keep floors and corridors clear of rubbish or blockages – this makes it easier and safer to work and also cuts down fire risks.



### Find out more

- Download a guide on workplace health, safety and welfare at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg244.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg244.pdf)

### Did you know...

One small company was fined £3,500 in court because it didn't have adequate washing facilities for employees who were at risk of getting dermatitis



# By law you must...

## ...plan for first aid, accidents and ill health

You have to organise first aid arrangements where you work. If you employ people, you're responsible for making sure they get attention straightaway if they get ill or injured.

If you're self-employed, with no staff, you need to have a first aid kit.

If you have staff, you must have:

- a stocked first aid box
- an 'appointed person' to take charge – someone who co-ordinates first aid where you work, restocks the box when necessary and calls an ambulance if needed. This person doesn't have to be a trained first aider
- information for employees giving details of what you've organised for first aid.

You may decide that you need someone trained in first aid. Your first aid assessment will highlight this – you just need to consider your situation and write down anything significant, along with what you plan to do to deal with it. For example, think about how far away from your nearest surgery or hospital you are, and whether any of your staff have complex medical conditions.

By law, you must report and keep a record of certain accidents, incidents and illness.

### Find out more

- Get information on first aid at [www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid](http://www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid) and a leaflet on first aid from [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg214.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg214.pdf)
- Find out what needs reporting and how at [www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/index.htm)
- Buy an accident book from the HSE at [books.hse.gov.uk](http://books.hse.gov.uk) or record the details in your own system

### Did you know...

Four people are killed every week at work

## ...display the health and safety law poster

If you employ anyone, you must either display this poster, or give each member of staff the pocket card version. The poster outlines UK health and safety law and includes a simple list that tells employers what they and

their employees need to do. There is also space on it for you to name your health and safety representatives, if you have any, and health and safety contacts, for example, your local environmental health officer.

### Find out more

- You can get copies of the poster and pocket cards from [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/lawposter.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/lawposter.htm)

# By law you must...

## ...get insurance for your business

If you have employees you'll probably need employers' liability insurance. It protects you against any costs of compensation in claims made against you by an employee if they get injured

or ill and it's caused by your business. There may be other types of insurance you need, such as public liability, or 'driving for business' cover if you're a mobile therapist.

### Did you know...

One small business owner was fined nearly £4,000 with costs of £3,000 after it was found to have no Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance



#### Find out more

- Download information on employers' liability insurance at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hse40.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hse40.pdf)
- Find out more on insurance at [www.abi.org.uk/Information/Business/15310.pdf](http://www.abi.org.uk/Information/Business/15310.pdf) and [www.abi.org.uk/Information/Business/40507.pdf](http://www.abi.org.uk/Information/Business/40507.pdf)

## ...keep your business up to date

Keeping up with news and developments in your sector will help you keep your health and safety policy and risk assessments up to date. You'll find help through trade unions, employers' organisations, Business Link and trade associations.



#### Find out more

- Read IOSH news and sign up to RSS news feeds at [www.iosh.co.uk/news](http://www.iosh.co.uk/news)
- Subscribe to free ebulletins at [www.hse.gov.uk/news/subscribe](http://www.hse.gov.uk/news/subscribe)
- Get podcasts from [www.hse.gov.uk/podcasts](http://www.hse.gov.uk/podcasts)

# Issues to think about

We've covered some of the basic things you need to do to comply with the law. Here, we look at some specific issues and legal duties relevant to your work in complementary or beauty therapy.

## Using and storing essential oils or beauty products

Most of the products you use are completely safe, but some can be hazardous under certain conditions or if you use them in the wrong way. Remember that potentially harmful substances include cleaning products, such as bleach, as well as base oils, essential oils, and even lotions and creams if they include colourings or perfumes that can sensitise the skin – think about eyelash tints, tanning spray or nail treatments. Substances can have an 'acute' (immediate) or a 'chronic' (long term) effect. A chronic reaction is slower and often builds up after repeated exposures over days, weeks or years. You could suffer from a respiratory problem like occupational asthma, dermatitis (a non-infectious skin disease, which is painful and can look unsightly), eye irritation or even skin burns.

Here are some basic pointers to help you – and your staff, if you have them – when working with essential oils:

- make sure you're trained to handle oils safely, for example, getting mixing ratios right – this should have been covered under your original professional training
- treat your clients in a well-ventilated room
- make sure clients aren't allergic to the oil you plan to use – carry out a patch test on new clients or when using a new product
- store essential oils in airtight sealed containers and a cool, well-ventilated place
- keep oils out of reach of children, if they may be around
- don't leave essential oils near sources of heat or flame
- wear gloves when prepping and mixing oils – this will cut down the time you're in contact with them, and reduce the chance of getting occupational dermatitis.

### Did you know...

16,000 people in just one year suffered from skin problems because of their work

## Issues to think about

Nail cosmetic products like hardeners, adhesives, polishes, artificial nail primers, UV gels, polymers and wrap resins can all irritate your skin. Make sure that you:

- wash hands thoroughly before and after each service as well as before eating and after handling products
- keep containers tightly closed when they're not being used
- keep products in their original containers where possible
- make sure any decanted products are clearly labelled
- store all products properly – follow the guidance on the safety datasheets from your supplier. Make sure you store flammable products like wax-cleaning solvents out of direct sunlight and at room temperature or below.



### Find out more

- Find out more about preventing breathing problems at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg95.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg95.pdf)
- Find out how to avoid developing dermatitis at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg233.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg233.pdf)
- Find out more about nail services at [www.habia.org/healthandsafety/index.php?page=749](http://www.habia.org/healthandsafety/index.php?page=749)
- Find out more about waxing safety at [www.habia.org/uploads/waxing\\_code\\_of\\_practice\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.habia.org/uploads/waxing_code_of_practice_booklet.pdf)



# Issues to think about

## Contact with the body and skin

Your work means that there's a risk of infections being passed between you and your clients. Treatments such as acupuncture, aromatherapy and reflexology may lead to infection through, for example, broken skin or contaminated equipment. As a result, you – or your clients – may come into contact with infectious materials and viruses such as HIV or Hepatitis B or C. It's critical that you, and anyone you employ, take steps to avoid these risks:

- keep nails short and long hair tied back
- take off any jewellery (including your watch) before treating a client as it can harbour germs and could catch or cut your client's skin
- protect yourself and your clothes by wearing a uniform or apron and think about wearing gloves if you have any cuts or sores on your hands, or you're doing abrasive work such as exfoliations
- wash your hands before and after the start of any treatment – use anti-bacterial soap
- use single-use acupuncture needles for individual clients and then dispose of them in a yellow sharps bin – they're treated as medical waste (ask your local environmental health officer for advice if you're not sure what to do)
- dispose of clinical waste as you were taught during your professional training
- keep your treatment area and equipment clean – for example, clean and disinfect anything your clients have direct contact with at least once a day, and replace used towels and paper covers on your treatment table after each client
- look out for signs of athlete's foot or verrucas before you start treating a client – if you do see any evidence of these highly contagious viruses

and fungal infections, you may not want to carry out the treatment until the client's GP confirms that there's no longer a risk of cross-infection. Remember that it's not just you who could get infected, but your other clients too

- cover any open boils, cuts, sores and wounds using a waterproof dressing
- use disposable surgical gloves if you have a skin condition like eczema, and the skin is damaged
- never eat or drink in working areas.

If you or your staff's work involves handling 'sharps' (including needles, scissors, blades or tweezers) for day-to-day activities like skin piercing and acupuncture, it may be worth getting immunised to protect against diseases like Hepatitis B.



### Find out more

- Find out more about blood-borne viruses at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg342.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg342.pdf)
- Find out about controlling infection risks at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/infection.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/infection.pdf)
- Find out more about hygiene in beauty therapy at [www.habia.org/healthandsafety/index.php?page=746](http://www.habia.org/healthandsafety/index.php?page=746)
- The Melanoma Taskforce and British Association of Dermatologists have developed guidelines aimed at hairdressers, masseurs, therapists and other wellbeing professionals to help them pick up on signs of skin cancer when they're dealing with clients – find out more at [www.babtac.com/melanomataskforce](http://www.babtac.com/melanomataskforce)

### Did you know...

Skin cancer kills more than 2,500 people in the UK every year



# Issues to think about

## Aches and pains

It's not surprising that with all the repetitive treatments you do, and a lot of standing, you may get a few aches and pains from time to time. You may find that your wrists, hands, arms, neck, shoulders or back are affected. A few simple steps will help to avoid the odd pain developing into a longer term problem known as a 'repetitive strain injury' – these can happen if you're repeating one action too frequently, you do the same task for long stretches of time without taking enough breaks, and when you exert a lot of force in the task, for example when you're massaging.

You, and your staff if you have them, should:

- use a height-adjustable therapy couch
- use a saddle stool rather than a standard one – they cut down stress on your legs and back, but still allow you to balance well, stand up quickly and move about easily
- take regular breaks
- use massage tools, such as rollers, and 'hands-free' techniques, using hot stones, or your elbows and forearms, where possible
- vary the types of appointment you handle in a day
- find out about the best posture to use when working.

### Did you know...

When you're massaging a client, you spend around 90 per cent of your time in a non-neutral neck-trunk posture and 64 per cent in a non-neutral wrist posture – increasing the chances of developing painful musculoskeletal problems

### Did you know...

Massage table height affects your posture during treatments – if the height is wrong, it can lead to back pain for massage therapists and chiropractors



## Lifting and carrying heavy equipment

You – or your staff – may lift and move around couches, trolleys and various bits of equipment. If you're working as a mobile therapist then you'll probably be doing this day in, day out. If you don't lift and move things properly, you could suffer back pains, as well as sprains and strains in other parts of your body. Remember that if you get a more serious injury, it could put you out of work for a while.

To cut the risks of getting injured down:

- work out the tasks that could lead to an injury
- try to avoid manual tasks that pose more of a risk – for example, use a trolley to move therapy equipment instead of carrying boxes or cases around
- assess the task you need to do and think about the type of load (eg is it difficult to grip?), the environment (eg is it in a tight space?) and the individual's capabilities (eg do they have a back problem already?)
- make sure that you cut down the risk of someone injuring themselves as much as possible, for example by buying a lightweight portable massage table
- if you're the boss, make sure your staff have the right training.

## Using sunbeds

Using sunbeds or tanning booths can be harmful. High levels of exposure can cause skin problems – including conjunctivitis, rashes, dry and itchy skin or sunburn – and in the long term, can lead to skin cancer, premature skin ageing and a higher risk of cataracts. Make sure your staff are aware of the risks from working with UV tanning equipment and how to cut down these risks.

It's good practice to offer goggles for customers and staff. You or your staff shouldn't go into the UV treatment area while the UV lamps are on, unless it's an emergency. You should think about how you'd give immediate help to customers using your UV tanning equipment, for example if they get too

hot or feel unwell. Make sure that your equipment has an obvious, clearly labelled emergency cut-off switch, within easy reach without having to get out of the tanning unit.

Other points to remember include:

- make sure you understand the manufacturer's information on how to operate your UV tanning equipment
- always carry out general cleaning, repairs and re-tubing when the UV lights are off
- make sure that no UV light is escaping from the tanning cubicles or beds into areas that staff access – if you can see the purple UV then you're exposing employees and others to radiation
- advise clients not to wear cosmetics or deodorant as they can increase skin sensitivity to UV radiation
- offer facilities for clients to shower or wash
- make sure that children (under 18) accompanying adult clients aren't exposed to UV radiation
- make sure the equipment is cleaned and sanitised between customers.



### Find out more

- Find out more about safe lifting and carrying at [www.hse.gov.uk/contact/faqs/manualhandling.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/faqs/manualhandling.htm)

### Did you know...

Musculoskeletal disorders – from back pain to sore wrists – affect one million people every year

# Issues to think about

## You also need to consider...

- **Working on your own** – if you're a mobile therapist, remember to let a friend or relative know where you're going, especially if you're visiting a new client. You may want to use a simple 'call in' system.
- **Slips, trips and falls** – if you work in a salon or small unit, keep the floors clean and clear.
- **Electricity** – make sure fixed and handheld equipment works properly and that your electricians are serviced and tested by someone with the right skills and qualifications.
- **Working temperature** – it can get hot and humid in a therapy room, so make sure yours can be easily ventilated.
- **Fire precautions** – if you have a salon or unit, or treat clients at your home, you have to have a fire risk assessment. You have the same responsibility whether you rent or own the property. Think about how a fire could start (the top two reasons are arson and electrical faults) and how you and your clients, and your staff if you have them, would escape if there were a fire. Your assessment, which should be written up, should cover what action you've taken to minimise the risks – for example, making sure you use up-to-date electrical kit and getting hard-wired electrics (inside the walls) checked by qualified electricians. You will also need to decide on the right types of fire extinguisher, think about signage and make sure exit routes are kept clear. Don't forget to include a fire management plan, which covers how often your alarms and emergency lighting should be tested, and who will do it, and your fire evacuation plan details. If you

rent your property, your landlord may cover some of these duties – check your contract or ask if you're not sure. Talk to your local authority adviser or a health and safety consultant if you need more help.

### Did you know...

Injuries caused by slips or trips cost employers more than £500 million a year

### Did you know...

In just one year, there were 31,000 fires in buildings used for business – 36 people died



### Find out more

- Find out more about the risks of working on your own at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf)
- Download our 'Going it alone' guide for a quick overview of things to think about when working on your own at [www.iosh.co.uk/safestartup](http://www.iosh.co.uk/safestartup)
- Look for more information on getting your electricians tested at [www.hse.gov.uk/electricity/faq.htm#maintaining-it-safely](http://www.hse.gov.uk/electricity/faq.htm#maintaining-it-safely)
- Get more information about fire precautions at [www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/firesafetylaw](http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/firesafetylaw)

December 2013

This IOSH guide is designed as an introduction to health and safety basics for low risk businesses, and is not intended to give exhaustive coverage of the subject. We encourage all employers and business owners to find out more about the detailed legal requirements affecting your business at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk).

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IOSH is the Chartered body for health and safety professionals. With more than 42,000 members in 100 countries, we're the world's largest professional health and safety organisation.

We set standards, and support, develop and connect our members with resources, guidance, events and training. We're the voice of the profession, and campaign on issues that affect millions of working people.

IOSH was founded in 1945 and is a registered charity with international NGO status.

**Institution of Occupational Safety and Health**  
Founded 1945  
Incorporated by Royal Charter 2003  
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