

Massage for Muscle Fitness

Massage therapy should become part of early sports training sessions

by Armand Ayaltin

Muscles are supposed to contract in order to perform a task at any given time. Upon completion of that task they are supposed to relax.

In as much as this procedure can be repeated indefinitely, without any or much problem, a muscle can be said to be fit. In real life muscles are often driven hard to do repetitive jobs which tax their reserves to the limit. That's where they lose their fitness to do what they were supposed to do - which is contract and relax. We end up with muscles which are at different stages of constant contraction, fibrous and scarred. But help is at hand. Fortunately for us, massage was invented centuries ago just for the muscles and the whole human structure. It seems to have muscled the test of time successfully, giving comfort and healing to countless sufferers. It is a wise person who knows how and when to use tools for healthy living to their advantage.

Massage treatment is applied by the hands of the therapist, and this therapeutic human touch favorably impacts the psyche and the emotions of the patient. As treatment progresses by a series of multi-dimensional pressures, stretches, pulls and pushes, the muscles are diverted from their daily routine of doing whatever they do, be it housework, driving, typing, walking, sitting or athletics.

Daily monotony of occupation restricts muscle activity to a familiar pattern. This is one of the reasons a new activity, however light, sometimes creates muscular soreness. The theory is that the muscles were involved in a new dimension of movement. Massage, therefore, by ruffling muscles in every direction, comes as a fresh breeze to the dreariness of daily muscle routine.

Tightened muscles tend to restrict blood flow. As well we all seem to be plagued with differing degrees of muscle tightness, most of us suffer from circulatory sluggishness in some parts of our bodies. Tightness also

makes muscles more prone to injury. Improved circulation provides them with all the nutrients they need for their renewal, repair, removal of waste metabolites and their optimally healthy functioning.

Another important component of the circulatory complex touched by massage is the lymphatic system. Healthy functioning of the lymphatic system is crucial to the health of the tissues. It is through this medium that unused amino-acids by the cells are returned to the main blood stream. The blood must contain all the nutrients needed by the body - including the amino acids - every time a tissue site is visited, if it is to do an optimal nutritional and repair job. The lymphatic system also neutralizes many of the inflammatory by-products of an injured muscle or joint.

If we can appreciate the crucial role of these processes, it becomes quite clear how important it is to have a free flowing blood/lymph system. It is only through the rhythmic cycles of physiologic activity that our bodies stay healthy and alive. With each heart beat, as new supplies of blood reach the tissues, fervent activity is taking place. Massage therapists use lymphatic massage techniques to specifically stimulate the flow of lymph, which among other benefits, helps remove *cedematous* accumulations from the site of the injury, in some cases reducing the pain dramatically.

As one progresses with massage therapy, another obvious sensation that the patient experiences is the succession of rhythmic strokes. This seems to soothe and calm the nerves. Let us not forget that the nervous system controls the circulatory system.

However massage therapy can be quite painful. The important point here to remember is that it is not the therapist who is inflicting pain. It does not hurt to deep massage a healthy muscle. Pain is in the muscle. It is the price of carelessness. Hope-

fully pain will be a reminder for prudence next time we make a muscular move. Having said that, I must also say not all pain is the result of injury, sport or activity. Emotional stresses and weather changes are some of the most common causes of acute muscular pain.

Obviously, people engaged in any serious sport will be more prone to injury than non-participants. Common sense should alert us all to the means available for health support before we embark on any type of physical activity. The first line of care begins with a vigorous treatment, followed by suitable stretching exercises just before a game. This warms the muscles up and prepares them for the actual event.

The second line of care, depending on the sport, could be during a break, especially if an injury is suspected. Many minor injuries, such as tears and cramps, may occur during game. In the heat of the moment usually not much is felt, but immediate treatment of a minor injury is much more effective in preventing scar and fibrous tissues from forming than at a future time, when the athlete has started to feel the cumulative effects of such injuries. The third stage of care would be at the end of the game. A warm shower or bath, followed by a massage, will take care of any residual tension or tightness and equalizes the circulation, thus optimizing the muscles' chances of recovery from overwork and stress.

Bone fractures should be dealt with by a surgeon. Depending on where the cast is placed, massaging above and below the cast will improve circulation, speeding up repair. When the cast is removed treatment will be even more effective in minimizing scar tissue formulation around the fracture.

Scar tissue can become quite a nuisance at best, and downright painful and problematic at worst. Massage therapy is well-suited to dealing with such problems.

Massage: Physical Medicine

by Armand Ayaltin RMT

The explosion of massage therapy on the North American health scene during the last 20 years has been widespread. Many are probably still wondering what massage really does, when to use it and what to expect from it.

These questions sound legitimate enough and, for most of us, are the right ones for evaluating the subject. But they stem from a disease /drug-specific orientation. Before answers pertaining to a truly "holistic" therapy like massage can make sense, we need to define disease and therapy and the way the two interact.

From the natural therapeutics perspective, disease is not an absolute entity. It is a process. So is healing. Each is negotiated within an individual's emotion-mind-body complex configuration.

In Canada, massage is used mostly as a topical application for musculo-skeletal problems and injuries. But massage is more than an emergency therapy for muscle disease. Fortunately, for the recipients of the treatment, benefits don't stop at the structural level, regardless of the intentions of the therapist. That's the reason patients taking therapy, especially the systemic variety for chronic injuries, find that their health in other areas also improves significantly.

In the traditional medicines of China, Japan and the Middle East, including ancient Greece and, relatively recently, Europe, massage has been and still is a major therapy central to all their health-restoring measures. Are all these cultures misguided in using such a "simplistic" treatment? Not at all, if one looks into it slightly more than skin deep.

History of Massage

The consultant cardiologist in one of London's (England) foremost hospitals has introduced massage for patients. In Germany, the general medical approach is to explore massage, hydrotherapy and herbal baths as the first line of attack for disease at special spas. Most complaints resolve during a two-week stay at such a resort and it's paid by medical insurance. Non-responsive cases are investigated further. Doesn't this sound like a sensible strategy for the well-being of patients and for the insurance companies? The massage therapy approach to health may be used to free much strained funds for the expensive

techno-medical procedures.

I remember many years ago, one of my patients, a medical doctor, called me for an emergency home visit. Upon arrival I saw an oxygen tank by his bedside. He explained that he had pneumonia. Puzzled (I shouldn't have been), I asked why he had sent for a massage therapist. His short reply was revealing: "Do you know a better therapy for pneumonia?"

Is there any evidence to show that massage therapy can improve health? As practiced in its "holistic" context worldwide, massage therapy is termed "physical medicine." Physical stimulus induced by massage becomes the body's own "medicine" to initiate an improved physiological function from the cellular level up.

In the late 1960s, Dr. Kim Han, and later in mid 1980s French researcher Pierre de Varnsjoul, used radioactive tracers to verify the existence of the acupuncture meridial network with its own fluid system. Moreover, they found that the body (both animal and human) had two additional levels of meridian systems, all communicating via a capillary bed of connecting tubules .5 - 1.5 microns. Most importantly, the terminal tubules accessed the nuclei of tissue cells!

A Healthy Flow

The fluid was examined and found to be a high concentration of amino-acids, nucleotides, DNAs, RNAs, estrogen, corticosteroids and many other hormonal substances, quite different from the blood and the lymph.

Data gathered suggests that every organ is fed by this fluid and if there be any congestion in the meridians, corresponding organs become deprived of their support system.

Where does this congestion start? The most common site is in the muscles. Every time a muscle remains contracted, congestion is in progress. As a therapist, I am amazed at the mass of cramped muscles I encounter daily. This situation slows blood/lymph/meridian fluid flow and creates pools of stagnant metabolites. Add to it dietetic, postural/occupational, social, financial, mental and emotional factors and we have a web of blockage forming conspirators at different levels. In light of all these, does the centuries' old practice of massage start making sense?

Basically, good massage therapy by the finger, fist, and elbow actions of the therapist attempts to break-up accumulations of metabolites, often hardened to a fibrous mass. Blood/lymph and the meridian fluids then can resume their repair and maintenance of the tissues. Soreness may follow a treatment.

"Natural" degeneration of the bodies

goes on in an orderly fashion in what is termed as the "aging process". To keep this process healthy, is one's one responsibility and is a life-long procedure if health is the objective.

Massage is uniquely situated to carry the task of multi-level health and body maintenance for mankind in a compassionate way. Family members may administer this socially and caring measure daily on schedule with other benefit. However it would take much more than the caring strokes of a mate to deal successfully with musculo-skeletal injuries and chronic pain. Massage therapy is health therapy, it shouldn't be confused with general relaxation.

Recommended Reading:

Aromatherapy for Common Ailments

by S Price (sc) 96pp \$15.95

Infant Massage

by VS McClure (sc) 199pp \$13.95

Aromatherapy for Mother and Baby

by P. England (sc) 156pp \$18.95

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