



Massage and Sports Related Injuries by Mark Little

When the subject of massage is brought up to many people, they envision an expensive Spa setting where clients bask in decadent relaxation. In many cases this is true. What is often overlooked is the use of massage for injury management and recovery. People use their bodies. It's our vehicles to navigate through life. Many people choose to use their bodies to ride a mountain bike, run for exercise, go for a hike, paddle a kayak, ski moguls, play softball, etc. As many of us know, we can injure ourselves in even the most mundane of activities. Regardless of the cause, we hurt and we want to feel better. Massage can help.

First, let us briefly look at the musculoskeletal system of our bodies. Ligaments connect bone to bone; tendons connect muscles to bone, and contraction of muscles pull bones towards each other creating movement. Blood flow brings oxygen and nutrients to the muscles and removes damaged material and metabolic waste. Nerves communicate to the muscles and are like the bars on a cell phone: more bars means a better signal. Ideally, these components work together fluidly to help us perform our desired activity

These structures become injured through trauma, misuse, not being stretched or warmed prior to activity, misalignment, or just plain overuse. Nerve flow can be impaired by muscle or joint impingement, resulting in poor signal transmission. All of which athletes are subject. The result is pain, swelling, lack of mobility (temporarily, if not permanently) and a body which will now work to compensate for the original loss of mobility. Left alone, the body will strive to repair the damage. Often this is not back to the original form.

The body will build scar tissue to repair damage. This scarring can interfere with the healthy function of muscles and tendons. It can reduce the elasticity and extensibility of the muscle, limiting the range of motion. For an athlete, the result is a decrease in performance. Treated effectively, the body can recover with the help of a massage therapist.

Most massage therapists acquire a working knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the human body. This includes the location, origin, insertion and action of the skeletal (voluntary) muscles of the body and how the body functions to help the muscles perform. Massage techniques like neuromuscular therapy, deep tissue and active isolated stretching help create space between the muscle bellies, increase blood flow, lengthen and broaden muscles and break up adhesions and scar tissue. Combining this anatomical knowledge and focused technique allows the body to do what it was designed to do: heal itself.

Life happens. Injuries and accidents happen. While we can't always do anything about these events, we can choose how we respond to them. Given healthy nutrition, exercise, rest, and bodywork, our body can recover a wide variety of adverse situations. When injury occurs, consider bodywork as part of your recovery plan.

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