

Sports Massage

Aims of massage

In all types of massage, the therapist has specific aims in mind, and in sport we focus on the individual needs of the athlete. With the ever growing number of people taking part in sport, combined with the increasing competitiveness and intensity of physical exercise, the demand for sports massage is also increasing and becoming more and more recognised as a skill which may aid recovery and enhance performance.

Sports massage does have some aims in common with other forms of massage and it is especially important to have a thorough understanding of anatomy and physiology, in particular the muscular and skeletal systems. By understanding these systems and the effects of exercise, we may also appreciate how massage may benefit the sports person and becomes an integral part of the athlete's training program.

Athletes who are looking to improve performance and increase their competitive edge do so by adopting a training schedule to enhance their skill, strength, stamina, suppleness and speed. The degree to which they develop and utilise these qualities will depend on other factors such as the level of competition, the sport played, and possibly their position in a team. However, no matter which sport, the aim is nearly always to increase the level of training and thereby subject the body to gradual and controlled overuse.

It is this overuse that may often create problems and imbalances in the soft tissues. If these are ignored and allowed to become chronic, they will not only hinder the athlete's rate of improvement, but also in many cases their performance may well suffer and ultimately the athlete may be susceptible to developing more conditions that are serious. Certainly if they are unable to perform at their best, they may be more at risk from other more traumatic forms of injury. For example, a player involved in a contact sport who is "carrying" an injury may not have their usual level of agility. The result might be that they might suffer an extrinsic injury because of not being fully prepared for the contact suffered from an unexpected tackle.

Benefits of Sports Massage

Massage, applied skilfully, is the most effective therapy for releasing muscle tension and restoring balance to the musculo-skeletal system. Received regularly this may help athletes prevent injuries, which might otherwise be caused by overuse. A constant build up of tension in the muscles from regular activity may lead to stresses on joints, ligaments, tendons, as well as the muscles themselves.

These muscle imbalances may develop and often go undiagnosed until they are serious enough to cause the athlete discomfort or impede performance. The skilled massage therapist will be able to detect variations in the soft tissues and by using the correct techniques, help the sports person maintain a much healthier physical state. It may therefore be reasonably claimed that one of the greatest benefits of sports massage is in helping prevent injury.

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