

Understanding

SPORTS MASSAGE

Professional sports massage by a qualified AMTA member can provide an athlete with several performance advantages.

Regular sports massage can:

- reduce the chance of injury, by relieving stress points in muscles, before they result in restrictions or spasm;
- improve range of motion and muscle flexibility, resulting in improved power and performance;
- shorten recovery time between workouts;
- maximize the supply of nutrients and oxygen through increased blood flow;
- facilitate the body's regular processes for recovery from exercise;
- decrease performance anxiety and sharpen mental focus.

Three areas of sport massage

Athletic trainers know that keeping an athlete in top physical form requires a regular prevention and maintenance program, as well as on-site treatment before and after an athletic event. And, when strains, sprains, bruises, or other major injuries occur, a variety of treatment modalities may be necessary to speed healing and reduce discomfort. Sports massage therapy can help certified athletic trainers in all of these areas.

MAINTENANCE MASSAGE

An effective maintenance program is based on the massage therapist's understanding of anatomy and kinesiology, combined with an expert knowledge of which muscles are used in a given sport and which are likely candidates for trouble. By zeroing in on particular muscle groups and working specific tissues, the sports massage therapist helps the athlete maintain or improve range of motion and muscle flexibility. The overall objective of a maintenance program is to help the athlete reach optimal performance through injury-free training.

"Sports massage bridges the gap to optimal performance." — Curtis Millar Sports Massage Therapist Professional Hockey Team

EVENT MESSAGE

Pre- and post-event massage therapy are tailored for distinct purposes.

Pre-event massage is used as a supplement to an athlete's warm-up to enhance circulation and reduce excess muscle and mental tension prior to competition. It also improves tissue pliability, readying the athlete for top performance.

Post-event massage, on the other hand, is geared toward reducing the muscle spasms and metabolic build-up that occur with vigorous exercise. Various sports massage techniques enhance the body's own recovery process, improving the athlete's return to high-level training and competition, and reducing the risk of injury.

"I was a little concerned, because I couldn't really walk well...and my mobility was very, very limited. But two days of electrostim, massaging and heat treatments really loosened things up." — Michael Jordan, Retired Professional Basketball Player

REHABILITATION MESSAGE

Even with maintenance massage, muscles may cramp, tear, bruise, and ache. Sports massage can speed healing and reduce discomfort during the rehabilitation process.

Soft tissue techniques employed by sports massage therapists are effective in the management of both acute and chronic injuries. For example, adding lymphatic massage to the "standard care" procedure in the acute stage of injury will improve control of secondary, edema formation and enhance lymphatic uptake of fluid throughout the healing cycle. Trigger point techniques reduce the spasms and pain that occur, both in the injured and "compensation" muscles. Cross-fiber friction techniques applied during the subacute and maturation phases of healing improve the formation of strong and flexible repair tissue, which is vital in maintaining full pain-free range of motion during rehabilitation.

In all cases, such massage techniques are employed in collaboration with other appropriate medical care. For example, encouraging circulation around a bruise, but not directly on it, through the use of compression, cross-fiber techniques or even long, deep strokes is only used after appropriate medical referral and diagnostics indicate that there are no clots formed in the area which may embolize.

How to choose a qualified sports massage therapist

A qualified sports massage therapist must be thoroughly trained in anatomy, physiology and kinesiology, as well as in the stresses inherent in a wide variety of sports. The therapist should have training and experience in all areas of sports massage—maintenance, event and rehabilitation.

Qualified sports massage therapists perform the highest level of sports massage therapy techniques, while working cooperatively with healthcare professionals such as physicians, athletic trainers, physical therapists, chiropractors, nurses, and others. At sporting events, sports massage therapists work with other medical staff, through a well-established protocol, to provide optimum, comprehensive healthcare services for athletes.

AMTA sports massage therapists have worked with athletes at the AAU, NAIA and NCAA Championships, the Goodwill Games, and Olympic Trial events; and with professional sports teams at venues around the world. In 1996, sports massage therapy was included for the first time as an official part of medical services provided for the Olympic Games in Atlanta. AMTA members constituted more than 70 percent of the sports massage therapists selected to work the events.