

At the Top of Your Game

Sports Massage a Must for Athletic Performance

Cathy Ulrich

"It was my first marathon and I'd been fighting a 20 mile-an-hour headwind for most of the race. When I finished, my upper back and hamstrings were so tight I couldn't stretch them myself," says Colorado athlete Camie Larson. "My husband, Jamie, found me and led me to the massage line. When I got to the massage therapist, she quickly assessed my condition. She worked on my hamstrings, softening and gently stretching them until they were loose enough so I could stretch them myself the rest of the day. She also worked on my back and shoulders, which were tight from battling the headwind. I'm convinced I would have been in big trouble had I not gotten the massage."

Professional athletes have known about the benefits of regular massage for some time, but amateur athletes and even weekend warriors find that massage is important for them, too. Most trainers and coaches advise their clients to get regular massage to enhance workouts, recover from competition, and rehabilitate injuries.

Muscles and Massage

Our muscles are designed to adapt to the demand of strenuous exercise. Athletic training and competition, or even exertion from heavy physical work, tears down the muscles involved. When muscles are allowed to recover following a workout, they increase their number

"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom."

-Thomas Jefferson



Regular massages while training for an event help athletes avoid injury and reduce fatigue.

Larson is just one example of a triathlete and runner who includes massage in her regular training routine. She commits to a massage every other week during the heaviest part of her training season and says, "If I get too busy and don't get a massage, I really notice the difference. My legs and shoulders are tighter and it's much harder to recover from training sessions."

of fibers to respond to the demand. This adaptation process builds strength in muscles and in the structural support of the surrounding soft tissues. It also affects their ability to relax.

Regular massage reduces the risk of injury by maintaining flexibility and

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range of motion. By helping the body eliminate the metabolic by-products of a workout, massage shortens recovery time and reduces soreness. In addition, massage improves circulation, which enhances athletic performance by increasing the oxygen and nutrient supply to the muscles.

Triathletes and runners aren't the only athletes who benefit. Cyclists and winter sports fanatics are taking to massage as well. A massage therapist can help assess each athlete's problem areas and target these specifically.

When to Get Massage

Depending on the athlete's specific sport and physical demands, massage can be targeted to different aspects of the athlete's needs. Massage is most effective when integrated throughout an individual's training program.

TRAINING

By getting regular massages during the training period prior to an event, an athlete can avoid injury, maintain flexibility and range of motion, recover more quickly from workouts, and reduce fatigue. Depending on how strenuous the training, it may be important to see your massage therapist weekly or even more often, especially during the heaviest part of your training. Your massage therapist can work with you to establish a schedule for your needs.

PRE-EVENT MESSAGE

Many formal athletic events, including running races, triathlons, and tennis tournaments, provide onsite massage. Pre-event massages are usually short (10-15 minutes), and are designed to increase circulation, relax muscle tension, and calm pre-event jitters. A short massage can enhance performance so the athlete stays relaxed and on his/her game plan. For pre-event massage, talk to the therapist about your massage history. Bodies used to massage will react differently than those unaccustomed to bodywork.

POST-EVENT MESSAGE

Recovery is the primary purpose of post-event massage. Athletes push themselves harder during an event than while training. For example, during a marathon most athletes run a greater distance during the event than they've

ever run during their training. A massage afterwards is key. In Camie Larson's case, her massage therapist was able to relax her muscle tone, improve her circulation, and restore her flexibility. This allowed for a quicker recovery and return to training without the stiffness and soreness she would have had otherwise. Post-event massage can be that first assessment for potential injuries, and more serious medical conditions (heat exhaustion or hypothermia) may be identified early and treated promptly.

REHABILITATION

Muscle strains, bruises from contact sports, and chronic soreness need special attention. Whether encountered during training or during an event, massage is a key component in assisting an athlete to return to their sport sooner. Massage therapists can work closely with doctors and athletic trainers

to establish a schedule for therapy. Specific manual techniques reduce scar tissue and muscle spasm, and the enhanced circulation achieved from massage is crucial to healing.

"I'd pay more for an event to have massage available," Larson says. "When I compete in events where there's no massage, I definitely notice a difference the next day. When I'm training, my massage therapist works out the kinks, which allows me to train a little harder. It's the difference between having fun and being a hurting unit."

Whether its professional marathon training or weekend warrior sports, getting a massage can ease muscle soreness, help your body recover more quickly, and get you ready to go again. And, of course, massage helps you deeply relax--an important key to overall wellness.



Getting a massage after a strenuous workout or event helps minimize soreness.

Massage and Cancer

A Viable Option?

There's no doubt that cancer patients can benefit from massage therapy. In fact, bodywork can serve as a nurturing healthcare option during the stressful, doctor appointment-ridden time of oncology management.

"Cancer treatment places a heavy toxin load on the body, which massage can help eliminate," says Gayle MacDonald, author of *Medicine Hands: Massage Therapy for People with Cancer*. "However, too much too fast may be more than the client's body can comfortably handle. Skilled touch is beneficial at nearly every stage of the cancer experience, during hospitalization, the pre- or post-operative period, in the out-patient clinic, during chemotherapy and radiation, recovery at home, remission or cure, and in the end stage of life."

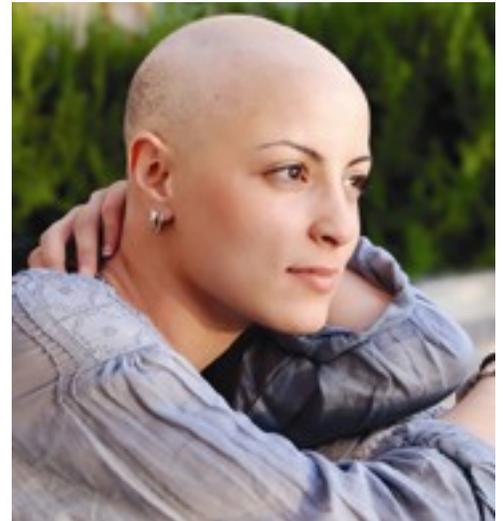
The benefits of massage for these clients include improved blood circulation, equalized blood pressure, and help with fatigue and nausea. The place to start is

by consulting with your physician and your massage therapist. For those who are two to three months out from treatment, bodywork that can be used includes lymph drainage therapies, trigger point therapy, neuromuscular therapy, myotherapy and myofascial release, among others. It's better to wait before receiving deeper work.

While hospitalized, some appropriate techniques include cranialsacral therapy, polarity therapy, reiki and Therapeutic Touch. MacDonald says no matter how severe the treatment's side effects, there's always a way to administer some type of bodywork. According to massage therapist and former oncology nurse Cheryl Chapman, while it's important to receive touch from a qualified practitioner who has worked with cancer patients before, "Touch is always appropriate--there isn't anyone who is untouchable."

If you or someone you love is battling cancer, consider massage as a

therapeutic, nurturing choice to help navigate this difficult journey.



Bodywork offers nurturing relaxation.

Fabulous Figs

This little known fruit is rich in beauty benefits

Shelley Burns

As one of the oldest fruits enjoyed by humans, figs have a known history dating back to 9200 BCE in the Middle East. Part of the fig's mythology was that it had medicinal properties, like building muscle, enhancing fertility, and increasing stamina. Figs were considered a valuable gift in ancient times because of beliefs about these and other medicinal benefits.

Figs are enjoyed in Mediterranean countries, a region that has one of the healthiest diets in the world. Mediterranean cultures appreciate the nutritional potential of the fig, the benefits of which have been overlooked far too long in North America.

Figs are being used today to hydrate skin and restore its elasticity and firmness. They also help prevent cracked lips and

premature wrinkling. Figs have excellent hydration properties, since each has a water content of approximately 3/4 of a cup.

Alpha hydroxy acid (AHA) is used to refresh and brighten skin and is often used as an ingredient in skin exfoliation. Figs have natural AHA properties, and when ingested, behave somewhat like internal exfoliants. They also promote healthy digestion.

This ancient fruit also contains ficin, an antioxidant enzyme more powerful than papain (the active ingredient in papaya) for its ability to repair skin and slow aging.

Dried figs consist of a great source of soluble and insoluble fiber. Insoluble fiber has been shown to reduce

low-density lipoprotein (LDL), better known as bad cholesterol. Keep in mind that dried figs are high in natural sugars and should be used with caution if you have high blood sugar levels or diabetes.

Update your thinking on figs. They are not only a great source of fiber, but they are also a wonderful skin-enhancing resource.

Shelley Burns, a doctor of naturopathic medicine, completed studies at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, and has certification in complementary and integrative medicine from Harvard University.

"In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock."

-Thomas Jefferson

Hot, fun, and splashing into summer! Independence Day is upon us.....celebrate our awesome country! BBQs, pool parties, hiking, biking, walking, running, climbing, floating, swimming, etc. are excellent remedies to release the workplace or school tensions. Relax and breathe to expel more stress. Enjoyment is an excellent solution to assist in rejuvenating everyBODY! Happy Summer & Safe Journeys, Julia

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