

Sports & Remedial Massage Therapy

What is it?

In 2003 I qualified as a Sports & Remedial Massage Therapist, as part of my journey to become a cycling coach. So what is it and how can it help me, as a cyclist? S&RMT covers all forms of hands-on soft-tissue therapy excluding high-velocity joint manipulation (this is covered by osteopathy and chiropractic). The two main aims are: 1) keeping you on top form while you're training and racing; 2) rehabilitation after injury to get you back to top form, through massage, stretching and exercises.

Benefits

The principle benefit of sports massage therapy is to enhance performance. Firstly, as recovery from training and racing, by flushing out the waste products from exercise and encouraging fresh nutrient-laden blood into the muscles. Also by preventing major injuries by spotting potential problems early, e.g. areas of tension or micro-trauma, or muscle imbalance.

Massage also promotes a full and speedy recovery from soft-tissue injury, both at the site of injury and by dissipating tension in the neighbouring muscles. Massage can also help a full and speedy recovery from other injuries because there will always be a soft tissue component.

Massage can also make you feel generally better by reducing overall levels of tension throughout the body and restoring the natural balance of the nervous system.

Specific techniques

As part of your training, you learn many different techniques and approaches. Just as no two people are the same, no two treatments will be the same, even for seemingly identical conditions or situations.

The first techniques you learn are the two basic massage strokes: **effleurage** (strokes along the length of the muscle) and **petrissage** (kneading across the width of the muscle). These two together form the basis of your treatment sessions and are great for post-race or exercise recovery massage.

On the diploma course you learn more techniques that are useful in specific circumstances:

Deep friction is used for specific areas of soft tissue damage which results in the build up of scar tissue. This involves deep, localised massage of the area of trauma.

Soft Tissue Release can also break adhesions by stretching the muscle while fixing the area of adhesion with your hand/elbow. It is also an excellent addition to your pre-exercise warm up routine.

Muscle Energy Technique is a powerful but controlled way of stretching and particularly useful for increasing your flexibility.

Neuromuscular Technique is the most common treatment method for chronic muscle tension. By applying and maintaining pressure to the area of chronic muscle tension (often called a "trigger point") the tension in the muscle eventually reduces or disappears completely. An advanced version of this, **Proprioceptive Neuromuscular**

Facilitation, combines NMT with movement and stretching to achieve a deep and lasting relief from muscle spasm.

Fascial Release stretches and relaxes the thin layer of skin covering each muscle and also breaks adhesions between on muscles fascia and another, by rolling the skin through the fingers or separating one muscle from its neighbours. This is particularly useful to help change a person's posture or in recovery from injury.

Therapist Training

I did the excellent diploma course run by the London School of Sports Massage, affiliated to the Institute of Sports & Remedial Therapy (www.theism.com). The course takes 18 months to complete and attendance is one weekend a month at the college. All of the ISRM accredited courses are to BTEC HND standard. It was all a bit of a shock to the system as I left full-time higher education 20 years ago! You do regular coursework, sit challenging exams, perform assessed practicals and you also need 100 hours of logged treatments.

Case studies

I have treated several people in the club, both on an ongoing basis and for specific injury rehabilitation. I have also treated a wide variety of other people from the local area, including a charity cyclist (now a regular CTC cyclist) who I helped with bike fit and back problems; a footballer with groin strain; a rugby player with a broken wrist (back playing after 6 weeks); a car dealer with migraine (symptoms gone after first session) and most recently I treated Val Korsen's severe upper leg bruising and muscle damage following her fall.

Interested in finding out more?

If you are interested in S&RMT then your first step is the weekend introductory course which is a pre-requisite to the full diploma. Here you learn what S&RMT is and by the end you can confidently perform a good quality full body massage.

Rachel McKay, Wednesday, 02 January 2008

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