

## **Sport Massage Therapy**

Massage Therapy is known to be one of the earliest forms of physical therapy. Today, Massage Therapists are behind the scenes at National and International competitions. Everyone can benefit from Massage Therapy whether they are a world-class athlete, an occasional athlete, or a weekend warrior. Sport Massage is a field within Massage Therapy that focuses specifically on enhancing training, preventing injuries, and assisting the healing process when an injury does occur.

All athletes want to improve performance and have a competitive edge. This can be accomplished by incorporating a training schedule that will enhance skill, strength, stamina, suppleness, and speed. Factors such as sport, competition level, and possibly position on a team will also affect the training schedule. No matter which sport, the aim is almost always to increase the level of training and thereby subject the body to gradual and controlled overuse. This is where massage is beneficial because it will enable the athlete to train harder and do more during each session. The athlete will also require less rest between training sessions and events. While working with an athlete over time, a skilled Massage Therapist will be able to evaluate muscle tone. This will help the athlete maintain a healthier physical state by detecting variations in soft tissue.

Receiving regular Massage Therapy treatments may help athletes prevent overuse injuries. It is this overuse that can create problems in soft tissue. If these injuries are ignored and become chronic they will not only affect how quickly the athlete may improve but may also affect the athlete's performance. Eventually the athlete may be susceptible to developing more serious conditions. For example, a rugby player who has a minor overuse injury may not be able to compete at their usual level of ability. As a result, this athlete might be unknowingly compensating for that injury and suffer another injury while not being fully prepared for varied field conditions or an unexpected tackle.

Sport Massage has 3 separate aspects that share the same goal of enhancing performance.

### **1. Pre-Event Massage**

Pre-event massage is generally administered 20-30 minutes prior to a competition. Massage can also be beneficial several hours to 1 to 2 days prior to an event and aid the athlete in sustaining peak condition while not interfering with their training and preparation.

#### Benefits:

- Assists the athlete in preparing for competition or training if used with a proper warm-up
- Improves circulation which can maximize the supply of nutrients and oxygen to the body
- Calms nervous tension
- Decreases muscle spasms (decreasing pain)
- Breaks up adhesions (increases range of motion)
- Prepares the athlete for optimal performance while reducing the chances for injuries
- Promotes strength, speed, power, and endurance
- Decreases pre-competition anxiety (psychological benefit)

#### Precautions:

- Do not soothe – massage is very brief with fast stimulating techniques
- Not intended to replace the need for a comprehensive warm-up
- Not intended to be used as a therapeutic treatment to treat injuries

### **2. Post-Event Massage**

Post-event massage is generally administered 30 minutes to 6 hours following a competition. Massage can also be beneficial up to 2 days after an event or heavy training and is intended to further the body's recovery process.

#### Benefits:

- Enhances and accelerates recovery (adequate recovery is also a major factor in avoiding over-training syndrome)
- Decreases muscle pain, tension, stiffness, spasm, fatigue and soreness
- Reduces DOMS (delayed on-set muscle soreness)
- Increases circulation and accelerates removal of waste products
- Creates a prolonged state of reduced muscular tension
- Psychological benefits (promotes relaxation)

Precautions:

- Techniques should be deeper and longer than pre-event massage
- Flushing massage with generous free movement and light sustained passive stretches are intended to prolong warm down
- Do not start to integrate more therapeutic work until after 2 days

### **3. Preventive/Training Massage**

Preventive/Training Massage is administered 2 or more days before or after an event. Massage allows the athlete to train harder and more consistently by focusing on the prevention of developing chronic injuries and aid in the healing process of current ones.

Benefits:

- Adds consistency to training
- Decreases strain and discomfort of training
- Helps eliminate trigger points and areas of stress
- Relieves tender areas before they become injured
- Decreases the chances of injury (could help lengthen the athlete's career)
- Restores lost mobility
- Promotes proper scar tissue formation which prevents scar tissue from adhering muscular fibres together
- Helps heal chronic injuries if they do occur

### **Contraindications**

As with any form of therapy there are a number of circumstances that Sport Massage could be detrimental rather than beneficial. Some contraindications for massage include but are limited to the following:

- High body temperature
- Acute traumas such as open wounds, recent bruising, contusions, and burns
- Acutely inflamed veins or arteries (varicose veins, phlebitis, or thrombosis)
- Cancer
- Melanoma
- Haemophilia
- Infectious skin diseases such as bacterial infection, lymphagitis, fungal infections, viral infection, or herpes
- If the athlete has reacted adversely to massage treatments in the past
- Pain that is worse at night
- Tingling in both feet or all 4 extremities
- Bladder or bowel function problems
- Anaesthesia or parathesia in groin or genitals
- Signs of hyper or hypothermia
- Do not massage directly over skin rashes, deep bruises, bone breaks, tumours or cysts

Sport Massage can assist the athlete in all phases of competition reducing soreness during the training process, giving a head start before competition and speeding recovery after the event. Soreness and injury experienced by both elite and occasional athletes make Sport Massage beneficial to everyone.

For more information on Sport Massage contact the Canadian Sport Massage Therapists Association at [www.csmta.ca](http://www.csmta.ca).