

Sports Massage

What is a Sports Massage?

Sports Massage includes different techniques that focus on manipulating the soft tissues of your body to correct imbalance caused by athletic performance. In addition to your muscles, which you would expect to receive manipulation in an ordinary Swedish massage, sports massage focuses on fascia, which lines and connects all the structures in your body, and even tendons and ligaments.

Why Would I Get Sports Massage?

"Sports Massage is enormously beneficial for athletes who are looking to improve their range of motion, increase flexibility, relieve muscle aches caused from recurrent activity, and manage any pain associated with specific sports such as tennis elbow.

The theory is that when you perform repetitive movements in your training, such as the continual flexion/extension pattern of ankles, knees, and hips in running and hiking, you create imbalances in the soft tissues surrounding those joints. There is only so much impact a pair of the best trail running shoes can offset. Basically, your body adapts to the needs of your sport, but that can sometimes result in imbalance that affects your ability to perform other activities and day to day tasks. This imbalance can look like dysfunction, tension and even pain.

Sports Massage focuses on correcting imbalances occurring in the soft tissues so that they operate normally around the functional movement of your joints.

What Issues and Injuries is Sports Massage Helpful For?

Sports Massage can provide a range of benefits to support physiological function and wellbeing, and like any massage it may also have psychological benefits.

"Pressure on deep tissue can reduce inflammation, lessen scar tissue, and increase blood flow, all of which are great ways to promote injury healing and enhance performance."

These Are Some Benefits of Sports Massage:

- May help prevent future injuries
- Relieves existing injuries
- Helps to maintain biomechanical function and balance
- Supports athletic performance
- Supports functional, pain-free everyday movement
- May provide psychological support for athletes
- Treats Muscle Pain
- Lowers Blood Pressure
- Makes You More Flexible

- Detoxifies the Body
- Reduces Stress
- Promotes Sleep
- Improve circulation and limited range of motion
- Reduce inflammation of the muscles
- Improve postural problems
- Alleviate osteoarthritis pain

Is Sports Massage Always Painful?

No, Sports Massage is not always painful. For some though, there will be a certain amount of discomfort experienced during the treatment. It is important to understand that there is a difference between pain and this kind of discomfort. As your Massage Therapist is not psychic, it is crucial for you to communicate with them if you are experiencing discomfort that becomes intolerable. The therapist will check in with you throughout the treatment, but they cannot predict the changes you will experience as they move along your body. Some areas may elicit pain or intense discomfort at a slight touch whilst other areas may be worked into with a lot of force without any discomfort at all. Try not to feel inhibited in speaking with your therapist about what you are experiencing. They will be open to adapting the treatment to accommodate your wishes. Deep breaths help many people to unconsciously let go of tension they are carrying. This can also help with avoiding the tendency to tense up in reaction to the pressure that is being applied.

How Is Sports Massage Performed?

Though the goal is to get your soft tissues to relax, do not necessarily expect the soothing, spa-like experience you probably associate with a Swedish Massage. Sports Massage is likely to be a bit rougher and faster and you will keep most of your clothes on or undress to your comfort level depending on the technique being used.

"Sports Massages focus on working the soft tissue with deep strokes and targeting connective tissue and inner muscle layers, which can help correct the problems created from sustained physical activity. Sports massages are often considered to be Deep Tissue Massages."

"Many first timers experience quick relief from their massage, and typically begin to feel some soreness a few hours later. This is common and nothing to be concerned about. The mild soreness from Deep Tissue Massage is a sign of healing muscles that were previously tense before rubbing out the tension."

Sports Massage can be performed before athletic performance as a warmup, immediately afterwards for recovery, for injury rehabilitation or as part of your regular training regimen.

When you arrive for your Sports Massage appointment, you will discuss your needs with your therapist and probably go through a movement analysis before they decide what techniques to employ. Sports Massage covers a variety of techniques, and you might receive several in a single session, for example:

Kneading: this technique is used to realign collagen fibers to improve mobility in the muscle by lifting the muscle in circular and upwards motions.

Cupping: in this practice, the therapist puts special cups on the skin to create suction intended to increase blood flow to the affected area.

Trigger point: trigger points are sensitive or painful areas in the muscle or connective tissue caused by compression. Pressing on a trigger point generates referral pain which can help pinpoint the area in the body where the pain originates.

Hacking: just as it sounds, the therapist will make chopping motions on your muscles using the sides of their hands to help stimulate circulations and the nervous system.

Wringing: with this technique the therapist lifts and squeezes the muscle while moving it in a forward and backward motion to help improve tissue elasticity.

Vibration: this technique can be done manually using a jostling motion, however new devices are being used in many clinics to apply electric vibration that can be either soothing or stimulating and targets the circulatory and nervous systems.

Stretching: A massage technique that consists of pulling a body region or extremity away from its most anatomically neutral position. Stretching may occur with (active) or without (passive) the patient's help.

Hydrotherapy: Topical hydrotherapy treatments uses hot and cold packs, ice, and hot or cold stones.

Muscle Energy Technique: Is a form of manual therapy in which muscles own energy is used to induce relaxation and promote pain relief. This technique is especially useful with pain and muscles stiffness.

Once in spasm, the muscle fibers are held in a state of constant contraction limiting the range and causing the muscle to relax. By using the muscle energy technique, the therapist will make muscles relax and lengthen to an optimal level to perform and heal.

Sports Massage vs Deep Tissue Massage

Sports Massage is a Deep Tissue Massage because it is designed to target areas deeper than the superficial level of your muscles, however a Deep Tissue Massage on the spa menu will likely be a full-body massage, whereas Sports Massage will focus on a specific area, such as your glutes or trapezius muscles.

Are There Any Side Effects?

Depending on the intensity and duration of the Massage you may experience various effects for up to a week after your treatment however most of the effects will usually be experienced within 48 hours of the treatment. The most common symptom is a soreness or tenderness in the areas that received the heaviest treatment. This discomfort is typically easy to identify as it feels different to the muscular pain that you were experiencing prior to having your treatment. This soreness will naturally fade within a few days so if your pain persists or worsens it is recommended that you consult with your General Practitioner or Physiotherapist. It is important to wait at least a few days to assess the effectiveness of the treatment as the initial soreness convinces some people that the massage has done some damage. This is unlikely to be the case so please be patient before you judge the outcome of your Sports Massage session. You could also feel very relaxed, tired, or fatigued after a treatment. This is normal and will usually be gone by the next morning.

Some Side Effects That Could Possibly Occur

- Muscle Soreness and Fatigue
- Headache
- Sleepiness
- Inflammation
- Nausea
- Bruising
- Aggravate existing injuries

What to Do Before A Sports Tissue Massage?

Gather Health Information

Prepare relevant health information for the therapist. A Sports Massage can be somewhat uncomfortable. If you have any pain in your body or injuries, this is information the therapist will need to know. Preparing the information ahead of time will ensure you do not forget anything when you are at your appointment. You may also choose to include information pertaining to any allergies you have or preferences on aromatherapy scents.

Hydrate Your Body

Drink water. Sports Massages are designed to break up knots and adjust your muscles. They also release toxins from the muscles, which might make you feel fatigued or nauseated after the massage. Staying well hydrated by drinking water before and after the massage will help alleviate these symptoms.

Take a Warm Shower

Take a warm shower before the massage to loosen up your muscles and help put you in a relaxed state. A fresh, clean body will also make the experience more pleasant for your massage therapist.

Wear Comfortable Clothing

Wear loose, comfortable clothing to the massage appointment. This will help you continue to feel relaxed and make the process of undressing easier. You may also feel sore or tender following the massage, so loose clothing will be more comfortable to wear.

During The Massage

Communicate what you are feeling during the massage. The therapist may use various techniques to work deeper into the muscle and these may be uncomfortable, especially in areas where you have tight or knotted muscles or scar tissue. If the experience becomes too intense, be sure to tell your therapist.

Are There Any Contraindications?

Yes, as with any form of massage, there are contraindications (reasons you should not have a massage). You should NOT have a Sports Massage if you have any of the following conditions:

- Open wounds – Any cuts, lacerations, or grazes. You should wait until the scar has properly formed which is usually between one and two weeks.
- Muscle ruptures (acute stage) – In the acute stage, soft tissue may still be bleeding. Massage will increase bleeding, tissue damage, and prolong recovery. After the initial 48 to 72 hours, massage may be possible, but it will depend on the extent of the injury.
- Tendon ruptures – The above also applies to tendon injuries. Complete ruptures are contraindications for massage and need surgery, not massage.
- Contusions – These are impact injuries causing bleeding within the muscle. Massage to a contusion too soon after the injury may cause further damage and may lead to Myositis Ossificans (bone growth within the muscle).
- Burns, Chilblains and Broken bones – Massaging all of these will hurt and cause damage.
- Myositis ossificans – A bad contusion or muscle rupture may begin to calcify (grow bone). Massage will make the damage worse.
- Other conditions include:
- Periostitis – This is inflammation of the sheath that surrounds the bone.
- Rheumatoid arthritis and gout.
- Bursitis
- Infections
- Thrombosis
- Hemophilia
- Tumors

Some contraindications only apply to localized areas of your body. You may be able to have a Sports Massage, but the therapist will need to avoid the area. Local contraindications include:

- Undiagnosed lumps and bumps
- Bruising and abrasions
- Burns including sunburn
- Pain without known cause
- Acute inflammation
- Varicose veins

What To Do After a Sports Massage

- Schedule a follow-up massage appointment ...
- Drink plenty of water after the massage ...
- Eat nutritious meals after the massage ...
- Avoid drinking alcohol and coffee ...
- Take a warm bath after the massage ...
- Relax and make sure you get enough sleep ...
- Avoid running or exercising immediately after the massage...
- Do some gentle stretching ...