

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



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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*When we are
unable to find
tranquility
within
ourselves, it is
useless to seek
it elsewhere.*

-La Rochefoucauld

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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.

The Art of Bathing

Simple Recipes to Soothe Mind and Body

From bubble baths to essential oils to Dead Sea salts, prepared bath products are designed to enhance a bathing experience, but they can be expensive. Instead of spending the extra money on special bath products, try one of these natural, simple bath recipes with ingredients you probably already have in your cupboard or refrigerator.

Epsom Salts

ADD 2 CUPS EPSOM SALTS TO BATH WATER. Magnesium sulfate, or Epsom salts, has been used for centuries as a folk remedy, and research now confirms its numerous benefits. The second most abundant element in human cells and a crucial component for bone health, magnesium is also needed for muscle control, energy production, and the elimination of toxins. Magnesium eases stress, aids sleep, and improves concentration while reducing inflammation, joint pain, and muscle cramps. Sulfates help to flush toxins from the body, prevent or reduce headaches, and even improve brain function.

Most American diets are deficient in magnesium. However, one of the best ways to boost dietary intake is by bathing in Epsom salts, which are readily absorbed through the skin.

Milk

ADD 2-4 CUPS MILK OR BUTTERMILK TO BATH WATER.

Rich in calcium, protein, and vitamins, milk replenishes the skin, while lactic acid found in milk acts as a natural exfoliant. A member of the alpha hydroxy acid family, lactic acid breaks the glue-like bonds between the outer layer of dead skin cells. Soak in a milk bath for 20 minutes, then gently scrub skin with a loofah or washcloth.

Honey

ADD 1/4 CUP HONEY TO BATH WATER.

A fragrant, natural humectant, honey helps skin attract and retain moisture. Its antibacterial and anti-irritant properties make it an ideal cleansing and soothing additive to a warm bath.



Turn your home bath into a spa experience.

Somatic Semantics

What Exactly is CAM?

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) refers to healing modalities that don't fall into conventional Western medical philosophy, including bodywork, acupuncture, herbology, homeopathy and mind/body techniques. CAM is becoming a more familiar term as approximately 125 million Americans suffering from chronic illness -- arthritis, back pain, hypertension, and depression -- look for solutions that conventional medicine can't provide.

"Complementary" modalities are used together with conventional medicine, such as utilizing aromatherapy to lessen a patient's discomfort following surgery. "Alternative" modalities are used in place of conventional medicine, such as

using herbs to treat stomach upset rather than taking pharmaceuticals. And the merging of alternative and conventional medicine is referred to as "integrative medicine," connoting the idea of combining the best of both healing philosophies.

CAM is continually gaining the respect of the Western medical system, as indicated by the nearly 100 medical schools now offering courses in alternative therapies. The University of Arizona is an exceptional model of such a school, offering the nation's only postgraduate, two-year Program in Integrative Medicine (PIM). Founded in 1994, PIM is designed to teach small groups of physicians how to integrate holistic modalities into their practices.

These doctors are committed to a fundamental redesign of medical education including such principles as:

--Appropriate use of conventional and alternative methods to facilitate the body's innate healing response;

--Consideration of all factors that influence health, including mind, spirit, and community;

--A philosophy that neither rejects conventional medicine nor accepts alternative medicine uncritically.

For more information and research about CAM, visit the nonprofit Alternative Medicine Foundation's website, www.amfoundation.org.

*Keeping your
body healthy is
an expression of
gratitude to the
whole cosmos –
the trees, the
clouds,
everything.*

-Thich Nhat Hanh

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