

To Touch *or* Not to be Touched

That is the Question

by Jeff Mann, PDMT, NCBTMB

Aches, pain, strains, pulls, sprains, fatigue, and micro trauma can be the price we all pay from time to time while trying to improve our health and well being. Whether it is from poor form, over exertion, or repetitive stress, all of us have experienced the painful side effects of strenuous exercise. How do we deal with it? The most common answer to that question is "NSAID" or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, otherwise known as ibuprofen (Advil, Motren, Midol). Non -steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are some of the most common medications used today. These drugs all have pain relieving properties.

Despite their constant presence in our daily lives, NSAIDs do pose a risk. Both The New England Journal of Medicine and the Pain Journal state that, "On average 1 in 1,200 patients taking NSAIDs for at least two months will die from gastroduodenal complications who would not have died had they not taken NSAIDs." With that being said, are there acceptable alternatives to these drugs?

The earliest form of pain relief and recovery known to man is still around today- the power of touch. Just think of your natural reaction when you first injure a body area. It is a natural instinct to hold or to rub the injured area. Basic touching of an injured body part has developed into what we know today as the art and science of massage. How can massage help those ache's and pains mentioned earlier?

Massage movements cause two types of responses in the body. One is the mechanical response (direct response brought on by force or pressure) and the other is the reflexive response (reaction to a stimulus that is governed by the nervous system). A massage can be primarily mechanical or reflexive in nature, but both responses are closely related and often occur simultaneously. Reflex responses to massage frequently occur due to mechanical stimulation of nerve receptors. It is through those mechanical and reflexive responses of the body that positive things happen.

During mechanical and reflexive responses to massage the amount of fresh oxygenated blood full of nutrients and pain relieving endorphins is pushed into the area of need, causing positive results. Massage promotes rapid disposal of waste products and replenishment of nutritive materials through increased circulation; further reducing muscle fatigue and soreness. A fatigued muscle recuperates 20 percent after 5 minutes of rest and 100 percent after 5 minutes of massage (Cuthberston, 1933, Evans, 1980).

Massage can help to maintain muscle in the best possible state of nutrition, flexibility and vitality, thus hastening muscle recovery and enabling them to function at maximum potential. Muscle tissue examined microscopically after injury proves that a massaged limb is more normal looking, contains no fibrosis around the blood vessel and appears larger than non-massaged muscles (Mennell, 1995).

All touch is not equal. For the maximum results from a massage, it is best to find a massage therapist who is adequately and professionally trained. Look for a massage therapist who is Nationally Certified by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) and has graduated from a COMTA accredited program.

Massage use and Massage education is on the rise. Organizations such as Cortiva Education are making great commitments to giving individuals the highest standard of education available for massage therapist. The next time you have a "tweak" or "twinge", why not get a massage!



Jeff Mann, PDMT, NCBTMB - Jeff is the President of Cortiva Institute - PSMT. Jeff has been with PSMT since 1987, and has been involved with the growth of PSMT in almost every conceivable way. From massage instructor, to curriculum development, to student clinic development, to school director, Jeff has been integral to all facets of running the school. His latest challenge is leading the transition that started when PSMT joined the Cortiva family of schools. Contact JeffMann@phillyfitmagazine.com

