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Self-Myofascial Release for Injury Prevention

by Donna Stone, L.M.T., C.P.T., and Julie Schelling, L.M.T., C.N.H.S.

The defining difference between a *seasoned* therapist and a *weathered* therapist is most definitely the ability to practice consistent self-care—and in an industry that strives to “go deeper” on our clients, it has become even more essential to address the topic of injury prevention.

The average career of a massage therapist is far too short. Many surveys have shown the average massage career lasts between five and seven years. “Research has shown that massage practitioners are at high risk for various work-related musculoskeletal disorders including: finger or thumb, shoulder, wrist, neck, arm or elbow and back,” according to a statement in the study, “Correlates of Injury-forced Work Reduction for Massage Therapists and Bodywork Practitioners,” published in the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork* (September 2013).

The fact that injury can occur does *not* make it inevitable.

In fact, the above-noted statistics enable us to understand the risk of injury to manual practitioners and implement effective strategies and techniques to reduce that risk. A successful prevention strategy is about considering *all* risk factors.

As successful massage therapists for close to a combined 60 years, we are passionate in our belief that prevention is the best medicine toward a long and healthy massage career.

Many, if not most, massage therapists have experienced pain or discomfort due to overexertion. It is common to hear this topic discussed among active massage therapists as we compare our injuries and share related strategies to address them. It seems we adapt to living our lives with sore hands, shoulders, necks and backs.

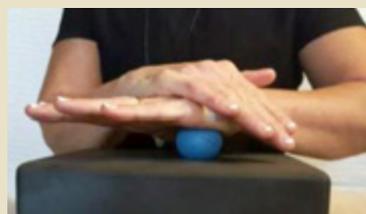
You don’t know what you don’t know until you know you don’t know it—right? If you aren’t aware of the risk factors that are prevalent in our industry that lead to injury-forced work reduction, how can you prevent injuries?



1

Place the ball onto a firm surface. Place your hand palm-down onto the ball and roll small circles slowly to

massage palm. Stay within your own comfort level of pressure. As you increase pressure, slow your movements. Breathe deeply and be sure to utilize good body mechanics while doing each of these self-myofascial release techniques.



2

Place your other hand palm-down onto hand that is on the ball to provide additional pressure, if needed.

Roll small circles slowly over entire palm, giving extra attention to areas of tension. Maintain static pressure for 30 seconds at the base of the thumb, then slowly move the thumb through range of motion comfortably.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DONNA STONE AND JULIE SCHELLING

In sports and tactical environments, it is known that the best defense is a strong offense. Let self-care be your offensive strategy to prevent injury *and* your defensive strategy to provide therapeutic touch while remaining relatively pain-free.

Risk factors

It is important to understand how risk factors cause injury. According to the World Health Organization, “A risk factor is an attribute, characteristic or exposure of an individual that increases the likelihood of developing a disease or injury.”

Assessing our personal and workplace risk factors allows us to create our own unique, personal profile which will determine how we can modify our work environment to fit our needs.

By understanding body mechanics, ergonomics and self-care, we are better equipped to maintain awareness of proper posture and stabilization throughout each massage session. By lowering your massage table to allow for deeper pressure and performing repetitive movements, for example, you could actually be creating pain patterns through the lumbosacral region.

Massage requires that we use a variety of techniques to reach specific goals with our clients. The combination of applying pressure, lifting, gliding, stretching and

traction will at some point compromise the integrity of our posture.

Injury prevention is about awareness. If a client is expecting a deep-tissue session during each visit and this creates discomfort or pain to you as a therapist, you may be compromising yourself. It may be just a small pain now; however, in time, micro-tears become macro-tears and that small pain will become a bigger issue. Ensuring career longevity requires us to consistently set healthy boundaries. Prevention is a verb—meaning it requires action.

Body mechanics

What is the difference between body mechanics and ergonomics? Body mechanics is when our body adapts to the physical demands of a workspace, such as widening our stance to work on a lower table. Ergonomics is when we adapt our environment to fit our personal physical needs, such as raising your table to a height that allows you to move more effectively and efficiently.

Perhaps you are not in control of your treatment schedule and you find it exhausting to keep up with the demands of your workload. Ergonomics includes setting healthy boundaries that allow adequate recovery time to stretch, enjoy a snack for blood sugar and properly hydrate.



3

Place your forearm onto the ball to massage wrist flexors. Slowly roll to find an area that is tense and tender.

Maintain static pressure for 30 seconds to allow fascia to respond. Place your other hand onto your forearm to provide additional pressure as needed. While maintaining static pressure for 30 seconds, add dynamic movement by slowly opening and closing your fist.



5

Turn your palm up and place wrist extensors onto the ball. Slowly roll until you find an area of

tension and hold static pressure for 30 seconds. Place your other hand onto your forearm to provide additional pressure as needed. Slowly roll to another tender area and repeat. While maintaining static pressure, slowly supinate and pronate your wrist to have a shearing effect.



4

Maintaining static pressure of flexors onto the ball, move your wrist into extension and flexion to facilitate

self-massage. Slowly roll the ball across the full length of the forearm to affect the entire wrist flexor group. Repeat. Supinate and pronate your wrist slowly to produce a shearing effect of the fascial tissues. Micro movements are best.



6

Maintaining static pressure of extensors onto the ball, slowly move your wrist into extension and flexion

to facilitate self-massage. Slowly move to another part of extensors and repeat. Treat the entire region and give extra focus to any areas that are tense and tender. Always stay within your comfort zone.

Maintaining balance is a key factor in alleviating burnout. Ultimately, the responsibility of our health and a healthy attitude belongs to each of us.

Regarding exercise, in our profession there is a prevalent fallacy that performing bodywork provides all the exercise we need as a practitioner. Not so. The physicality of administering therapeutic massage does

Self-myofascial release can help reduce soreness, promote tissue recovery, and improve joint range of motion.

not provide a cardiovascular benefit to the therapist and can cause fatigue.

It is essential to develop and maintain a complete conditioning program that includes strength, flexibility, balance, endurance, cardiovascular fitness, proprioception and good movement patterns. These will promote good circulation and cardiovascular health as well as facilitate mobility, flexibility and strength.

Further, utilizing massage techniques for self-care can increase flexibility and relieve pain. Just as you promote massage to clients, use it for yourself as well.

Utilizing self-myofascial release tools on your own soft tissue, for example, can help reduce soreness and promote tissue recovery, reduce trigger-point sensitivity and pain, and improve joint range of motion.

Injury prevention

In a world with so many choices, our primary mission is to recognize and develop healthy boundaries. To maintain our physical health and the health of our career, prevention is a key component. Making these proactive choices will help us prevent injury and enjoy the long-lasting massage careers we deserve.

Massage Advocates for Health Inc. (facebook.com/massageadvocatesforhealth) was established after years of collaborative effort between Donna Stone, L.M.T., C.P.T., and Julie Schelling, L.M.T., C.N.H.S. With close to 60 years of collective experience in the massage and wellness industries, their desire to empower their fellow therapists through self-care and injury prevention remains mutual. In their eight-hour National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork-approved course, the focus is to guide each attendee to create his or her own self-care. **M**

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