



Myofascial Release - An Introduction for the Patient

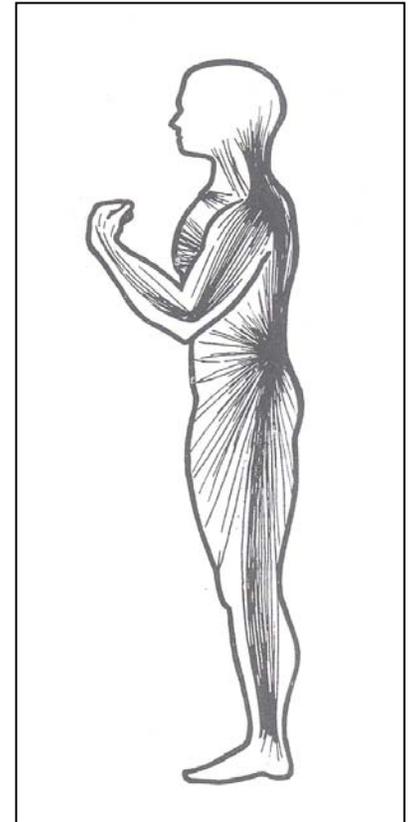
Myofascial Release Therapy is a very mild and gentle form of stretching of the body's soft tissues, which has a profound effect upon overall physical health. Muscle provides the greatest bulk of our body's soft tissue. Because all muscle is enveloped by and ingrained with fascia, myofascial (myo = muscle) release is the term that has been given to the techniques that are used to relieve soft tissue from the abnormal grip of tight fascia.

Fascia

Fascia, or connective tissue, is a body system which was given relatively little attention in the past. Fascia is composed of two types of fibers:

- A) Collagenous fibers, which are very tough and resistant to stretch;
- B) Elastic fibers, which are stretchable.

Functionally, the fascia may be regarded as a continuous laminated sheet of connective tissue that extends without interruption from the top of the head to the tip of the toes. It surrounds and invades every other tissue and organ of the body, including nerves, vessels, muscle and bone. Fascia is more dense in some areas than others. Dense fascia is easily recognizable (for example, the tough white membrane that often surrounds butchered meat.)



Fascia Man © MFR Seminars

When Fascia is Injured

Because fascia permeates all regions of the body and is all interconnected, when it scars and hardens in one area (following injury, inflammation, disease, surgery, etc.), tension can be put on adjacent pain-sensitive structures, as well as far-away ones. Some pain symptoms may appear to be unrelated to the original or primary injury or complaint. These "unrelated" symptoms can frequently be explained by understanding the fascial system as a whole.

Anatomy of Fascia

The majority of the fascia of the body is oriented vertically. However, four major planes of fascia in the body are oriented in a more nearly transverse (crosswise) direction. These four transverse

planes are extremely dense. They are called the pelvic diaphragm, the respiratory diaphragm, the thoracic inlet and the cranial base. Frequently, all four of these transverse planes will become restricted when fascial adhesions occur in just about any part of the body. Because the body's fascia is all interconnected, a restriction in one region can theoretically put a "drag" on the fascia in any other area.

Treating Fascial Restrictions

The point of all the above information is to help you understand that during myofascial release treatments, you may be treated in areas that you may not think are related to your condition. Myofascial release is a whole body approach to treatment. The trained therapist has a thorough understanding of the fascial system and will "release" the fascia in areas that he knows have a strong "drag" on your area of injury. For example, a person with chronic low back pain may also have significant discomfort in the neck. This is due to gradual tightening of the muscles, and especially of the fascia, of the back; and as this tightness crept up the back, it eventually created neck and head pain. Experience shows that optimal resolution of low back pain also requires release of the fascia of both the head and the neck; if the neck tightness is not also released, it will continue to apply a "drag" in the downward direction until fascial restriction and pain have again returned to the low back.

A key to the success of myofascial release treatment is that the pressure and stretch are extremely mild. Muscle tissue responds to a relatively firm stretch, but fascia does not. However, under a small amount of pressure (applied by a skilled therapist's hands), the fascia will soften and begin to release when the pressure is sustained over time.

After Treatment

You may leave after the first treatment feeling like nothing happened. Later (even a day later) you may begin to feel the effects of the treatment. There may be increased pain for several hours to a day after treatment, followed by remarkable improvement. Often remarkable improvement is noted immediately during or after a treatment. Sometimes new pains in new areas will be experienced. There is sometimes a feeling of light-headedness or nausea. Sometimes a patient experiences a temporary emotional change. All of these are normal reactions by the body to the profound, but positive, changes that have occurred by releasing fascial restrictions. Release of tight tissue is likely accompanied by release of trapped metabolic waste products in the surrounding tissue and blood stream. It is a good idea to "flush your system" by drinking a lot of fluids during the course of your treatments, so that reactions like nausea and light-headedness will remain minimal or nil.

Any questions or concerns that arise concerning myofascial release should be discussed with the therapist.

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