

A Joyful Awakening

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

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

Everything can be done better from a place of relaxation.

-Stephen C. Paul



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

Continued on page 2

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In this Issue

At the Top of Your Game
De-stressing the Commute
Flax Facts

Continued from page 1

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.

De-stressing the Commute

Turning Road Rage into Road Sage

The average American commuter spends an hour a day driving to and from work. During this stressful, stop-and-go time, it's likely that blood pressure increases, adrenaline begins pumping, and muscles constrict and tighten. By the time you get home, you're wiped out and grumpy, and you have less to offer to those you come home to. If this sounds familiar, recognize that you have the power to reduce commuter stress. Here are a few tips to make your commuter time contribute to -- rather than detract from -- your life.

- Employ adjustable back cushions, pillows, wedges, and lumbar supports for a more comfortable commute. For more information, check out www.relaxtheback.com.

- To successfully sidestep the late-afternoon slump often caused by the stress hormone cortisol, keep some healthy snacks within arms reach. Celery, string cheese, water, and nuts -- especially almonds -- are good options for the drive home.

- Borrow books-on-tape/CD from the library. Consider purely entertaining novels to ease the intensity of your drive.

- Learn a foreign language. Libraries also loan out these types of tapes and CD, too.

- Use your commute as an opportunity for spiritual or emotional growth. When stressing about a traffic jam, remind yourself that it's completely out of your control. Remember, attitude is everything.

- Practice breathing. When stress occurs, breathing becomes shallow and constricted. Taking full, deep breaths gives the body more oxygen, helping to regulate physical and mental function. Exhaling fully releases tension and built up toxins.

For more ideas on achieving calm in a busy world, consider reading *Serenity to Go: Calming Techniques for Your Hectic Life* (New Harbinger Publications, 2001) by Mina Hamilton.



Creativity goes a long way on your commute.

Flax Facts

Reap the Health Benefits of This Little Seed

Flaxseed, the humble little brown seed with a nutty flavor, is a powerhouse in the nutrition world. It's able to reduce blood pressure, decrease risk of heart attacks and stroke, improve skin quality, help control blood sugar levels, reduce cholesterol, and even prevent breast and colon cancer--all in a single seed!

But what makes flax so powerful? Flaxseed contains high concentrations of alpha linoleic acid, a form of omega-3 fatty acids, which serve as the basic building blocks of cell walls. Additionally, flax is high in lignans, powerful antioxidants known for alleviating menopausal symptoms and fighting breast cancer. There are three forms of flaxseed, making it easy to incorporate into your diet.

FLAX OIL

While available in capsule form to be taken as a supplement, flax oil is best consumed as a food to get the most benefits from it. Many nutritionists often recommend purchasing the oil in small quantities, storing it in the refrigerator, and consuming a daily intake of two tablespoons. You can add a tablespoon to your morning smoothie or substitute flax oil in the vinaigrette dressing for your salad.

Flax oil breaks down to trans fats when heated, so it should never be used in cooking. While lower in lignans than other forms of flax, the oil is sometimes processed to preserve the lignans. Check the label for details.

FLAXSEEDS

Whole seeds are sure to have all the nutritional benefits of flax. Simply add these to your granola or salads for a nutty flavor. If a little tough on the teeth, grind them in a coffee grinder and sprinkle on foods. One note: raw, whole flaxseeds contain chemicals that can affect thyroid function. To get around this, simply toast the seeds in the oven for twenty minutes at 250 degrees, or limit your consumption of raw seeds to three to four tablespoons a day.

FLAX MEAL

Ground flax meal is another option to get the powerful nutritional value of flax. Add a tablespoon of it to your smoothies for extra fiber, or stir it into your oatmeal in the morning.

*Cheerfulness,
sir, is the
principal
ingredient in the
composition of
health.*

-Arthur Murphy

ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS IN GREAT HEALTH

For many of us who are subconsciously or consciously tied to the annual school calendar, fall is a time to gear up with great energy to be busy and accomplish great things. To maintain this momentum it is important for us to support our health.

Our bodies, minds and spirits need our personal attention to be at their best. Getting enough sleep; eating nourishing foods; exercising to keep our muscles and joints moving; drinking lots of fluids to keep our cells hydrated and cleansed; making time to rest the mind; embracing cheerfulness and laughter in our day--such efforts make a remarkable difference in our focus, productivity and immune system strength. A Massage or Polarity session can support us further by providing a chance for us to relax and revitalize from our busy lives.

With great health, those great things we have set out to do this fall will get done quickly, efficiently and joyfully!

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