

SPORTS MASSAGE FOR RUNNERS

Sports massage is for managing, manipulating and rehabilitating soft tissues throughout the body. Soft tissues are our muscles, tendons and ligaments. Each bone has muscles and fascia to surround it and each joint has muscle, tendons and ligaments to support it. When your muscles are strong and elastic they stabilize motion, produce more power and reduce impact stress.

There are many forms of massage but a sports massage practitioner will focus on your needs as an athlete. If you receive sports massage regularly and applied skilfully it is a powerful aid to injury prevention. Sports massage releases muscle tension and restore muscle balance to the musculo-skeletal system. Muscular tension leads to stress on ligaments and tendons as well as to the muscle itself. A massage practitioner can detect variations in the soft tissues and correct muscle imbalances before they become serious enough to cause discomfort or impede your performance. They will use three main techniques:

- **Effleurage** mainly stroking movements to warm up the muscles and accustom the client to touch.
- **Petrissage** kneading into deeper tissues.
- **Friction** for deep muscle work and breaking up scar tissue or locked muscle fibres.

Trigger Point Massage for Runners

A technique that is flooding the running grapevine at the moment is trigger point massage. Trigger points are hypersensitive spots in the skeletal muscle. It feels like a tight area in the muscle tissue. It is called a trigger point because it triggers a painful response not only affecting where the trigger point is located, but also causing referred pain elsewhere in the body. For example, a trigger point in the back may reduce pain in the neck which has itself been causing headaches. Releasing these constricted areas in the muscles can help naturally manage pain and stress from minor and chronic injuries. There are special trigger point massage products, which you can use to unlock these dysfunctional muscles. Releasing each muscle group means the muscles can work together to give you a fast and smooth running gait.

A useful tool is to massage the neural centre for a muscle to release and activate the muscle. Before each run you can massage the various neural centres for the psoas muscles, the glutes, the hamstrings, the quads and lower back. For example the neural centre for the glutes is under the skull at the back of the neck, and the neural centre for the hamstrings is the point under the ear where the jawbone connects to the skull. You can use some of the massage tools that are available, to keep your muscles elastic and strong in between regular visits to a sports injury practitioner.