

## sprains, strains & other pains

In this edition of *News & Notes*, we are taking a look at how massage can facilitate the healing of a variety of soft tissue injuries. First, let's define what some of those injuries are.

Commonly called a "pulled" muscle, a **strain** happens when a **muscle** is overstretched to the point of tissue injury. A "pulled hamstring" is an (often preventable!) injury common in runners and other athletes. Although a strain is usually caused by a sudden overstretch, it can also happen due to an extreme contraction -- while attempting to lift too much while weight training, for example. The severity of strains can vary from mild microtears with little (if any) pain, to a complete rupture of the muscle.

A **contusion** is a crush injury to a muscle. It could be caused by a fall or a car accident. Contusions frequently happen in sports when players collide with each other or with a piece of equipment.

**Tendons** connect muscle to bone. An acute tendon injury, like a rupture, is not common because tendons are much tougher than muscles -- so the muscle is typically injured instead. But small microtearing of the tendon fibers certainly is common. This stress fatigue and tissue damage is what causes **tendonitis**.

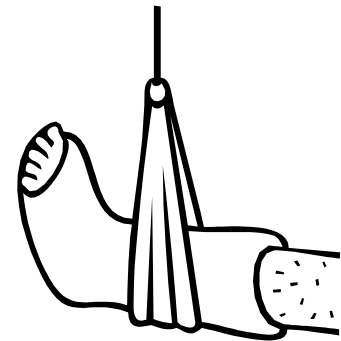
Tendonitis is a chronic injury; that is, one that happens over time. There is no single event that causes tendonitis. The movement itself is well within the

tolerances of your body, but the *repetition* of the movement causes (and sustains!) injury. It is the repeated load on the tendon that leads to microtears and the inflammation response. Things that compromise good positioning, thereby increasing your risk for injury, include poor body mechanics, a postural imbalance or doing a task with improper equipment. A common example is a computer workstation that isn't ergonomic, with the potential to cause a variety of repetitive use injuries including tendonitis.

**Ligaments** connect from bone to bone, creating stability around our joints. When ligaments are suddenly overstretched and injured, it's called a **sprain**. A mild sprain involves some stretching or tearing of the ligament fibers; there will likely be mild pain and swelling as well. Most of us have experienced an ankle sprain, which is a very common injury. The most severe type of ligament sprain is a total rupture. This makes the joint feel very unstable, like it's about to "give out". You probably know someone who has experienced a severe knee sprain.

When an injury occurs causing damage to tissue fibers, the body immediately tries to repair the injury by laying down scar tissue as part of the **inflammation** response. These connective tissue fibers knit together the torn edges of the injury and become what we commonly call a **scar**. Scar tissue is also formed in

situations of prolonged immobilization, like being in a cast or having a postural imbalance that impairs movement in a particular area of your body. When healthy tissues adhere to each other due to immobility, this is called an **adhesion**.



Adhesions and excess scarring can limit movement and functioning. This can then cause muscle tightness and compensations that, in turn, cause further pain and dysfunction.

Massage therapy is an important part of the continuum of care for strains, sprains, tendonitis and other soft tissue injuries. If you have been injured, please seek diagnosis and treatment from a physician. Then please give me a call to discuss whether massage could benefit you in your healing process. If you decide to use massage therapy to optimize your recovery from injury, I will conduct a thorough orthopedic assessment of your injury and functioning, in order to develop a treatment plan that is customized for you.

(Continued on page 2)

*(Continued from page 1)*

Massage therapy helps people recover from soft tissue injuries in several ways. Massage can decrease excess neurological activity, decreasing spasm and restoring proper muscle tone and length in the area of injury. Reducing muscle spasm will increase the flow of blood and nutrients to the area, which supports healing. Massage can also address compensations in posture and movement, as well as treat myofascial trigger points that may be contributing to pain and movement limitations.

Massage therapy is very effective in managing the development of scar tissue. In fact, doctors often instruct patients to massage their scars after surgery. There are specific techniques that help your body create the most functional scar possible. By functional scar, I mean a scar that offers both mobility and stability in the injured area.

In order to optimize the healing process, it is critical that you do any recommended self-care activities, like stretching or icing. If you are working with a physical therapist, or if your physician has recommended self-care exercises, it is important that your massage therapy treatment plan be developed with your other treatments in mind.

Your treatment plan for massage therapy will be designed to suit your unique needs. But the goal for everyone is the same: To return you to a state of full, pain-free movement.

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## NEWS & NOTES

*Hope you're having  
a wonderful summer!*

