



using massage TO ENHANCE performance

● By Bob McAtee

The beginning of the triathlon season is a good time to take stock of the year just passed and design a plan to do better in the year ahead. Are you happy with your performance in 2006? Did you accomplish the goals you set for yourself? How can you improve your performance for 2007?

As you begin your transition from winter activities, I'd like to suggest the systematic use of sports massage as part of your training regime this season. I've seen firsthand the benefits of consistent sports massage for many athletes over the last 26 years.

Recover More Quickly

The primary and most noticeable effect of consistent massage is the ability to recover more quickly and fully from exercise. The recovery period between workouts is a critical part of the training cycle. Your body adapts to the stress of exercise by getting stronger, faster, leaner, more agile, and more efficient. This adaptation occurs during the rest between workouts. Without rest, your body has no time to

improve because the demands you place on it are too great. This usually results in overtraining and your performance either plateaus or gets worse. Recovery days are critical; the more completely and quickly you recover, the greater your adaptation to exercise will be. This recovery and adaptation cycle results in improved performance.

Sports massage helps enhance your recovery in several ways. The mechanical action of kneading and squeezing the muscles helps to relax the fibers and remove excess tension. Massage helps to improve circulation by pushing blood towards the heart. This means that metabolic wastes are more efficiently flushed from the muscles and post-exercise soreness and stiffness are minimized. Improved circulation also means that nutrient-rich blood is getting to all the tissues more efficiently, which promotes their optimum health and healing after the stress of exercise.

Enhanced recovery means you'll be ready and able to train harder during your next workout. Maximal recovery promotes quality workouts. This cycle, repeated consistently throughout the season, should add up to improved performance overall.

Use Self-Massage

Ideally, you would be able to receive professional massage whenever you needed it to achieve your training and competition goals. Unfortunately, many triathletes feel they cannot afford the cost of regular massage.

One solution is to practice daily self-massage in between your professional massage appointments. Self-massage techniques are easy to learn and use and they will greatly contribute to your ability to relax and recover from workouts. They also help you get the most out of your regular massage sessions, because your therapist can work more specifically on the problem areas you've discovered during self-massage.

A good rule of thumb for doing self massage is to start with large, vigorous strokes that involve the entire muscle and work your way into smaller, more specific techniques that target areas of tightness or pain. For instance, large strokes include rolling, kneading, or long, gliding strokes that cover the length of the muscle. Follow these with smaller strokes, especially ones that work across the grain of the muscle. These cross-fiber strokes help separate and relax the muscle fibers. If you notice tender spots or muscle knots, moderate thumb pressure will help to relieve them. These techniques should not hurt, though they may cause some slight discomfort. When you've worked out some of these tight spots, finish up with the same large, vigorous techniques that got you started. Then move on to another area and start again.

See Results

If you begin a daily routine of self-massage and mix in professional massage as often as you can afford it, you'll discover that you recover more completely on your rest days, that you have fewer sore, tight and tender muscles, and that you perform better during competition.

Stay healthy out there.

Bob McAtee, NCTMB, CSCS is a sports massage therapist with over 26 years experience. He owns and operates Pro-Active Massage Therapy in Colorado Springs, Colo. His clientele includes Olympic and professional athletes, dancers, performers, and recreational athletes.

Bob has been teaching and writing about massage therapy since 1987. He is also the author of Facilitated Stretching, published by Human Kinetics Publishers. The book has sold over 80,000 copies since its release in 1994 and has been translated into Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and Japanese.

For more information or to contact Bob, visit his website: www.stretchman.com