

Some may ask how massage can be helpful to performance and training. When we as athletes use our muscles to propel ourselves through our chosen activities we breakdown the soft tissues in our body. As these tissues grow and repair they often become very tight and dense. We also produce vast amounts of metabolic waste. These toxins, such as lactic acid, can stay in our muscles long after we have stopped being active. Most endurance athletes are familiar with the effects of lactic acid building up in the muscles. We also have a secondary circulatory system known as the lymphatic system to move lymph back to the subclavian vein in the upper torso where it mixes back with the blood. This system has no pump similar to the heart. It is primarily modulated through movement and exercise. When this system is not able to clear the lymph and toxins at least as fast as the body is producing them we experience inflammation. This can result in decreased performance, increased recovery time, and commonly pain. Massage therapy can help with all these physical and physiological issues and is also great for mental relaxation. Through the use of heat, stretching, mechanical vibration, and manual manipulation massage therapy can help to move the lymph through the lymphatic system. It can help to clear the metabolic waste and toxins by squeezing them out of the soft tissue just as if we are ringing out a sponge. As we clear this fluid and these toxins from the affected areas new blood flows in with fresh nutrients and minerals essential for muscle contraction. These same nutrients and mineral are also essential for muscle relaxation. You may have heard to eat bananas for potassium to avoid cramping, this is one of the essential minerals and electrolytes necessary for proper muscle function. With new blood bringing nutrients, mineral, and most importantly oxygen to the tissues we can begin the process of repair. This helps the tissue to relax and encourages better recovery between workouts. As we physically stretch, stroke, and move the body we can also cause these muscles to lengthen and soften for maximum pliability. This take stress off of the tendons and joints, decreasing pain and increasing range of motion resulting in better performance in the training room and in competition.