

Article 3: Acute Pain vs Chronic Pain
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May 2018

Acute Pain is due to a very recent injury (usually defined as within the first 3 days). Traditional deep tissue massage is contra-indicated during this time. This makes sense, since the way deep tissue massage is taught REQUIRES that you cause additional pain in order to have a good effect ("No pain, no gain" -- remember?).

According to this logic, "Traditional" deep tissue massage should NEVER be used (remember that causing pain is actually adding more damage - see Article 1 - About Pain). In practice, massage therapists can "get away" with "Traditional" deep tissue massage on people who are generally:

- 1) without pain most of the time
- 2) in moderately good physical condition (athletes, etc.)
- 3) believe in "No pain, no gain".

For anyone already with significant pre-existing pain, the results are frequently debilitating. I met a woman while I was in training who said, "Oh, you're learning deep tissue massage? I had one of those once and couldn't get out of bed for 3 days!". My response, "You had a Sadist".

Every deep tissue massage therapist I have met since was trained with the indoctrination of "No pain, no gain". Some simply cannot bring themselves to inflict that level of pain on their clients, but feel guilty that they are not following their indoctrination, even though what they tend to do is much more effective than what they were taught.

For clients with acute pain (and no open wounds) who wish to accelerate their healing, painless deep tissue massage can be adapted to help.

- 1) It needs to remain painless
- 2) In order to do this, in the injured area, it will NOT be deep.
- 3) It will probably consist of light strokes from distal to proximal with the intention of helping the body to move out excessive inflammation or lymph and bringing in fresh blood.
- 4) In the injured area, the massage will be brief.

Cold compresses are usually used to help achieve more-or-less the same goals, but with less emphasis on clearing the area of excessive inflammation and lymph.

Chronic Pain is generally defined as pain lasting longer than 6 months.

In our lives, we are continually adding injuries. If not effectively treated, we will accumulate Trigger Points, which can gradually restrict our activity. Or, in the case of an accident or fall, quickly restrict our activity. The long-term result is pain that keeps increasing.

For less complex Trigger Points, some of the standard treatments can help a lot, heat, stretching, gentle motion, swimming, walking, etc. Especially anything that helps improve circulation in the affected area without adding pain.

Much of the time, people just adapt to the reduced function and call it "getting old".

This does not need to happen, and much of the reduced function can be recovered by certain kinds of bodywork. In my experience, "Painless Deep Tissue Massage" is one of the most effective ways to help.

Basic Rules of "Painless Deep Tissue Massage":

- 1) Try strongly to avoid adding pain.
- 2) Communicate clearly with your client
- 3) Most people tend to under-report their discomfort. Watch for non-verbal cues and ask them very clear questions - is this uncomfortable, etc.
- 4) ANY indication that they are approaching pain should cause you to IMMEDIATELY reduce speed and/or pressure.

During some initial training, I worked with a woman of 37 who found it increasingly difficult to climb even one flight of stairs. After an initial series of massages, I started finding extremely tight knots throughout her thighs. These started to release with gentle sliding pressure. After one or two sessions of release, she realized what had caused them: when she was in high school, she had been on the women's baseball team as a catcher. This involved long periods of time squatting. Her coach and teammates encouraged her "Don't let us down!" and "No pain, no gain!!". So she pushed herself beyond her body's limits. And 20 years later, she could barely climb one flight of stairs. After our work together, she regained her strength, flexibility, and energy. She made a move for work, but she later told me that as long as she has a good deep tissue massage about every 5 weeks, she is without pain and can do what she wants. This was the first time I realized just how much good massage could change peoples' lives for the better.

When I first started giving massages after graduating from massage school, a new client came to me. Steve was a concert pianist. When preparing for a concert, he needed to be on his piano bench 8 hours per day. He came to me because he could no longer sustain even 2 hours on the bench. He also had a lot of experience with a wide variety of massage and physical therapy over the years. We worked together with a variety of techniques and durations of massages for a total of 40 hours. At the end of that time, not only could he stay on the bench as long as he wished, but he could return to his old passion of gardening, even sitting on the ground with his fingers in the dirt. After his first massage, he said, "I've had many types of body work, but no one has ever gotten as deep as you have, and that is only in our first session."

This increased my confidence in my intuition and developing technique.

NEXT - Article 4: Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue

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