

## HEALTHY LIVING

## There's the rub

Deep-tissue massage, though uncomfortable, good for athletes

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Massage, it turns out, isn't just about pampering. The last thing most folks do while lying on a table getting the lactic acid pummeled out of their muscles is relax. But deep-tissue massage is an important part of a fitness routine, particularly for athletes. Vigorous massage can improve muscle flexibility, boost range of motion and ease stiffness. It can even improve blood flow and lower blood pressure.

It just doesn't necessarily feel all that good while it's happening.

"I survived another one," Austin, Texas, pro golfer Tom Kite moaned recently as he left AustinDeep, a massage therapy center in Austin.

Kite, who has 19 PGA Tour victories to his name, checks in for a massage once a week when he's not traveling. The body rotation required to play a game of golf is intense, and massage helps work out the kinks. He asks the therapist to focus on his back, glutes, shoulders, legs and hip flexors.

"On that table, it's not fun," he said. "But

it's something you need to do."

Jessica Price, owner of AustinDeep, works with many prominent Austin athletes, primarily runners, triathletes and golfers. Her client list includes former University of Texas basketball stars Brad Buckman, LaMarcus Aldridge and Kevin Durant; golfers Tom Jenkins and Joe Ogilvie; and triathlete Desire Ficker. Gilbert Tuhabonye, an elite runner and head of the Gilbert's Gazelles running program, is a regular.

"If you should invest in a good shoe, you should invest in a massage," Tuhabonye said.

After a long run, the muscles and layer of fascia underneath the skin can cinch up. A combination of stretching and massage can help prevent injury and keep a runner training, he said.

"So many things go wrong when you run: Your hamstring gets tight, your calf gets tight, your upper body gets tight," he said. Massage is the best way to loosen up again.

"You might scream, but afterward, you feel loose."

Todd Wright, director of strength and conditioning programs for basketball at UT, agrees. He played college football 20 years ago, when massage wasn't part of the routine. What was once seen as a luxury is now considered an integral part of developing an athlete. Members of the UT men's basketball

team get massages on a regular basis, he said.

"I think the evolution in training in the last 10 years and the science that has gone into it have pushed the envelope on how to help athletes maximize their potential," he said.

"Getting through the belly of a muscle and working it very deeply gives it the ability to bring more blood flow into an area," Wright said. It also helps loosen any muscle adhesions, which restrict movement.

I decided to try it myself. At AustinDeep, I stripped to my skivvies, then climbed beneath the bed sheets laid out on a table in the dimly lit room. Music played softly. After I'd had a few minutes to fret, Price came in. We discussed my problem areas — a stiff neck from a recent fall while slalom water-skiing; a calf injury from running; and

shoulder soreness from years of swimming. She started with fast, sweeping motions up and down my back. The friction warmed my body, and my skin turned pink. She then looked for points of tightness.

Just when I thought I could possibly doze off, she dived in with thumbs and fists, kneading my shoulder muscles like dough for a loaf of bread. Soon, it felt like a 200-pound rolling pin was wringing the life out of each muscle. I concentrated on breathing deeply.

I had promised to tell Price if the pressure was too much, and once or twice I did. Sometimes, clients don't — usually men. She said she usually can tell anyway, by the almost subconscious way they pull back from the pressure.

"You definitely feel my presence, but I work with your pain level," she said.

After an hour, I felt like a piece of tenderized beef. All I wanted to do was flop on the couch. But alas, I had to go back to work.

Price handed me a bottle of water and ordered me to drink up. I was rosy-cheeked and floppy-limbed. She warned me I would be sore and possibly bruised. But the worst is over.

"The relaxation starts when you leave the building," said Price, a runner herself.

Price has some tips for athletes looking for massage therapists. First, find someone with whom you feel comfortable. When you go in, describe as specifically as possible any muscle aches or pains you want worked on. Tell the therapist about any recent injuries; those areas should be avoided during a deep-tissue massage.

Timing is important, too. Don't schedule a deep-tissue massage immediately before a big race.

"You're moving things around, and your body needs time to heal," Price said. Your body needs time to recover after a big race, too. Wait a few days before scheduling a deep-tissue massage. (But those light rub-downs offered after some races are fine.)

The best time is after your daily workout, not before, and the day before your rest day.

I scheduled my massage for a Friday, so I had two days to recover before hopping back in the water for swim team practice. And when I did, I felt smoother. My arms had a greater range of motion. I felt like an eel slipping through the water.

Do eels get massages? ■



PHOTOS BY DEBORAH CANNON / COX NEWS SERVICE

Elite runner Gilbert Tuhabonye, head of the Gilbert's Gazelles running program in Austin, Texas, gets a deep-tissue massage from AustinDeep owner Jessica Price. "If you should invest in a good shoe, you should invest in a massage," Tuhabonye says.



Massage therapist Jessica Price says clients should tell their therapists about any recent injuries so those areas of the body can be avoided. And massages shouldn't be done before a big race. "Your body needs time to heal," Price says.

## Do-it-yourself 'massage' works

Is there anybody out there who doesn't love a good massage? I recently enjoyed my first deep-tissue massage.

Despite warnings that the intense, penetrating massage would hurt, it really wasn't too painful. There were a few moments when I groaned or grimaced, but it was one of those "hurts so good" kinds of pain.

But the massage hurts your wallet — 70 bucks for the hour, plus a tip. I can't afford that every week, not on a journalist's salary. In fact, I'm thinking about becoming a massage therapist.

You can, however, get some of the same benefits of a massage without the price. The odd-looking foam roller — a round, 3-foot-long device about 6 inches in diameter — does the trick for around \$30.

It does take some instruction and a little practice to learn how to maneuver on the foam roller, but — like a massage — it's great for working out kinks, especially in the thigh, hip and glute areas.

When done properly, rolling over those tight spots might make you wince, but the reward — feeling looser and being more mobile — is worth it.

"I think they're great," said Jeff Olivo,

physical therapist and certified strength and conditioning coach with Gwinnett Sports Rehab in Lawrenceville, Ga.

"You can use them for self-massage techniques and trigger-point-release techniques, as well as for stability training. There are a number of ways you can use foam rollers. I'm a big fan."

Foam rollers are great, I find, especially on my IT (iliotibial) band, a group of muscles that runs along the outside of the thigh, and piriformis, a small muscle deep in the buttocks. Those areas were affected when I suffered with sciatica, and although I no longer have pain, there still is some tightness on my left side.

"I find that the lower-body hip musculature is one that benefits well from doing self-release techniques because it's difficult to do [them] on your own without a roller," Olivo said. "I find it to be very effective. There's nothing better than hands-on, but I think it's a great substitute."

John Bocobo, trainer and founder of Performance 4 Life in Woodland Hills, Calif., is another proponent of foam rollers. In an article ([www.ezinearticles.com](http://www.ezinearticles.com)), he wrote that tightness and knots can alter the muscles' optimal length and disrupt how



Foam rollers can be used by fitness buffs to work the kinks out of muscles — especially in the thigh, hip and glute areas.

you move.

"When this happens, everyday movements can become labored and painful," he says. "The knots must be released so that the muscles can relax and return to their normal functioning length."

Foam rollers have become more popular in the past several years, Olivo said. While they're still hard to find at sporting-goods stores, they can be purchased online (search under foam rollers). You also can order instructional DVDs. ■

— Cox News Service staff writer Robert Haddocks is a certified personal trainer with the National Strength and Conditioning Association