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### New Office Hours 2023

Mondays	1:30PM—7:00PM
Tuesdays	9:00AM—1:00PM
Wednesdays	5:00PM—7:00PM
Thursdays	9:00AM—1:00PM
Fridays	1:30PM—5:00PM
Saturday	9:00AM—5:00PM

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# Off the Table

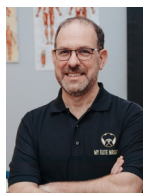
January 2023



Photo by Bazzy Photography

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## DOES YOUR BODY ACTUALLY WANT TO BE LOOSE?



By Kevin Smith, LMT, MMP

While I was attending the annual Erik Dalton workshop in Oklahoma City this past June, Paul Kelly, founder of PhysioKinetix, asked this question. It seems obvious that when our muscles feel tight that we want to feel looser and that massage would be the best option for that; but is it really what the body wants? Maybe in a few cases but what Paul Kelly pointed out with his question is: That's not the body's primary goal; what the body wants most is stability, not looseness.

Think about the last time you rolled your ankle and tried to put weight on it. Your ligaments were likely overstretched and therefore loose due to the injury and every time you put pressure on it before stability was restored, the brain said, "Nope; ankle's not ready for that yet so here's a little pain to keep you off it until it is."

Instability doesn't always come from an acute injury. Some people are born with certain joint instabilities. For others, sitting and sleeping habits can cause hip instability over time as can modern culture (computers, cellphones, driving, etc.) which also is wreaking havoc

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## Does Your Body Actually Want to Be Loose? (cont.)

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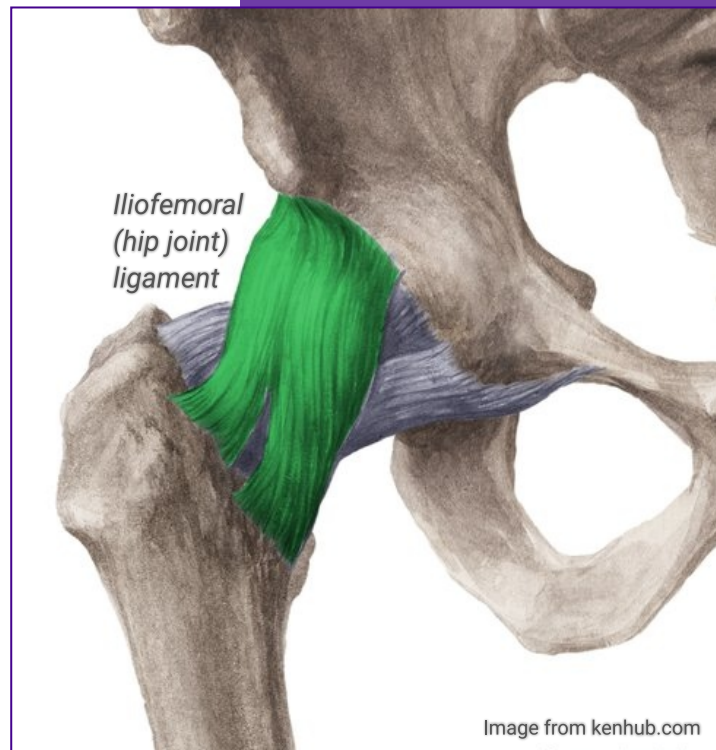
on our neck and shoulder stability. And how many of us can say we've paid attention to the stability in our feet in our lives, let alone in the last week or so?

The medical term used for this extra flexibility is hypermobility, and it is not the same thing as healthy flexibility; it is due to lax connective tissues (ligaments) in the hypermobile joint – and it is more common and causes more problems than you might think.

The most immediate symptom when there is instability in the body is that other muscles tighten up to pick up the slack – literally. This is called secondary guarding and when that happens, loosening those muscles should not be the first goal of your massage therapist or other professional; restoring the stability they are trying to mimic should.

And interestingly enough, in my experience, restoring stability generally makes those tight muscles loosen up without any direct attention. Why? They were protecting the weak muscles and unstable joints. That was their job and it was over as soon as stability came back. There are also exercises that may help restore stability to your body, many of which you can find in an online search. And for ligaments that don't respond to exercise, PRP (Platelet Rich Plasma) therapy has proven to be an effective means of retightening them – but only when the injections are targeted correctly using ultrasound. Your doctor or another online search can help you learn more about PRP therapy.

The bottom line? When your body has the stability it craves, everything that's supposed to be loose, is. That's when your body can freely do – without pain – all the things you love to do.



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## Improving Your Posture (Hint: It's Not Just Tight Pecs)

By Kevin Smith, LMT, MMP

It's fairly common knowledge that your pecs pull your shoulders forward, the Pec Major by rotating your arm in and forward at the shoulder joint and the Pec minor by pulling down on the scapula's coracoid process (a little finger of bone that comes to the front of your body) that also causes shoulder blade "winging", but it's not just the pecs that contribute to poor posture. Rectus Abdominus, a.k.a. your "six-pack" muscle, contributes to hunching by pulling your upper body forward and down. The SCM muscle has been discovered to attach further back than originally believed, reaching the occiput (base of your skull), and directly contributes to Forward Head (or Neck) posture.

And everywhere these muscles are tight (short of their normal resting length) and pulling you out of a normal neutral posture, there are other muscles losing this tug-of-war that are now weak and inhibited from spending too much time pulled longer than their normal resting length. These include your upper Trapezius, Rhomboids, Multifidus (deep spinal muscles), and more.

This means restoring posture requires a two-fold approach. The stronger muscles pulling you out of neutral (that rarely hurt) need to be relaxed and stretched, and the ones getting your attention through pain signals need to be restored to their neutral position (NOT stretched) and strengthened. Regularly restoring both the too short and too long muscles to their normal resting length will not only steadily improve your posture, it will reduce many of your aches and pains.

"I take a massage each week. This isn't an indulgence, it's an investment in your full creative expression/productivity/passion and sustained good health."



Robin S. Sharma

## Bodywork & Exercise

### Increase Body Awareness While Increasing Your Activity

By Ruth Werner, LMT, author of: A MASSAGE THERAPIST'S GUIDE TO PATHOLOGY

You have to give us credit: as a culture, Americans are incredibly interested in getting fit. We invest every year in new diets, exercise programs, and supplements for weight loss and improved energy. Low-range estimates suggest that Americans spend about \$2.6 billion each year on gym memberships alone.

We also tend to pitch full speed into any given commitment. If we're going to get fit, by golly, we're going to do it now, regardless of how long it took us to get into our current state. We don't do things by half measures, and moderation is not in our nature. So how do we keep ourselves injury-free while honoring our commitment to exercise and get healthy?

#### DOES IT HAVE TO BE ALL OR NOTHING?

We all know that starting an exercise program doesn't actually mean we'll finish it. When we throw ourselves into an ambitious new routine, we are likely to overdo it and get hurt. Then, we get discouraged, and may give up entirely, only to start

the cycle over in another year or so.

Overdoing things in the gym or on the sports field seems to appeal to our competitive spirit—especially when we're surrounded by others who all seem to be doing better than we are. Combine this kind of human drive with poorly trained athletic trainers who give bad advice about form, pacing, and effort, and we have a recipe for potential problems.

Exercise is only effective when it occurs without injury. Any new exercise program requires some caution, even if it is comparatively easygoing. And more challenging programs are safest and most successful when new participants build up their activity levels carefully and receive excellent guidance about form.

#### WHEN IT GOES WRONG

We accrue musculoskeletal and fascial injuries throughout our entire lifespans. In the best circumstances, they heal well, with a minimum of internal scar tissue, and function returns to practically normal levels.

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## Bodywork and Exercise (cont.)

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When things are ideal, that sprained ankle you got playing soccer at age 12 doesn't affect your ability to walk in your 30s. The lumbar strain you got from picking up the heavy laundry basket 15 years ago resolved well, so at 62, it won't hinder your golf game. We are able to adapt to minor injuries, and we learn how not to exacerbate them. But when we introduce a new exercise program, especially if that exercise program is more demanding, or demanding in different ways than we have experienced before, we risk the flaring up of old injuries. Scar tissue does not have the weight-bearing capacity of healthy muscle or connective tissue. This is when that old sprained ankle may make itself known, and that weakness in your back will definitely have opinions about your new routine. Sometimes you might feel like your new commitment to fitness was not the best idea.

### INJURIES CAN HAPPEN ANY TIME

CrossFit is one program that gets a lot of attention because of its reputation for being especially demanding. But any type of exercise can lead to injury if correct form is not observed. Zumba, Jazzercise, and other dance-like programs bring a risk of foot and leg injuries, including sprained ankles, plantar fasciitis, and stress fractures, because the risk for twisting at the knee is so high.

If you aren't paying close attention to your own limits, even yoga can be a source of soft-tissue injury: delayed soreness, problems at the neck and sacroiliac joints, or other injuries. One massage therapist reported seeing several injuries related to a prolonged yoga headstand, probably in a student who was not ready for this challenge.

### HOW CAN MASSAGE HELP?

Massage can help you deal with pain or soreness from your exercise regimen and can also help shorten recovery periods so you can train more efficiently. Although massage therapists are not primary care providers, and cannot diagnose conditions or prescribe specific treatments, your therapist may be able to offer excellent advice for dealing with a fitness-related injury. He or she may also have suggestions about warm-ups, cool-downs, and postexercise stretching, or be able to point you to an appropriate coach or other professional for specific exercise needs and to help prevent future injury.

The incidence of exercise-related injury has a lot to do with people not paying attention to their own needs. One of the many things massage therapy offers to people who want to become healthier and more fit is the chance to become more aware of your own body in a powerfully positive way. Increased body awareness and self-appreciation may be the best tools for helping you increase activity levels without hurting yourself. In this way, you can reach your goals with power and joy, rather than with pain and injury.

Mention This Newsletter at Your First  
My Elite Massage Session and Receive

**15% OFF**  
The Regular Price

Expires 03/31/2023

## How Effective, Really, is Massage at Reducing Stress?

By Kevin Smith, LMT, MMP

Whether it shows up as depression, anxiety, panic disorder, acute or chronic life events, type A personality traits, or hostility, stress increases the production of cortisol [Bunker, et.al. (2003), Field, et.al. (2005)]. When it is long term, the constant high levels of cortisol cause inflammation, eventually leading to high blood pressure, hypertension & heart disease.

Our bodies are designed with a system for managing and recovering from stress, called the parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS), which moderate-pressure massage has been shown to help activate. In his 2005 studies, Field, et.al. showed that massage therapy, on average, reduced cortisol levels by 31%, increased serotonin levels 28% & dopamine levels 21%.

A newer study, appearing in the September 2020 issue of Scientific Reports Trusted Source, by psychologists at the University of Konstanz in Germany has scientifically measured & confirmed that taking a few moments to relax can help manage stress, & adding a relaxing massage does even more to activate the PSNS & alleviate the physical and mental effects of stress, making massage an effective tool in your stress-reduction strategy.