



Self care tips for soft tissue pain and injury

Stretch – Some gentle stretching will help to break down any adhesions that have formed in the muscles, realign and lengthen the muscle fibres. Ideally the stretches should be done twice a day and held for between 10 and 30 seconds. Build up the time as the muscles begin to release. You should be able to feel a nice stretch but there should be no pain if it is hurting don't take the stretch so far only go to about 70% and build it up gradually. There are plenty of stretches to choose from on my website www.westwoodmassage.co.uk on the Stretches and Self care page.

Ice – The application of ice will help to remove any inflammation by sending the blood away from the affected area, it will also help to numb the area and reduce pain. Either use an ice pack or frozen peas will do, but be sure to wrap whatever you are using in a tea towel before you apply it to the skin to prevent ice burns. Ideally apply ice twice daily for approximately 10 – 15 minutes at a time but this will depend on the size of the area you are icing, if it's a finger for example 5 minutes will do, be careful not to overcool the area. Icing is usually very good for acute (new) injuries during the first 48 hours.

Heat – Heat is best applied to new injuries after approximately 48 hours when the worst of the inflammation has subsided. For any long term muscular pain I would usually recommend heat over ice. Applying heat will bring fresh blood to the area which will bring with it oxygen and nutrients needed to heal and removal of waste products, it will also help to relax the muscles. Use either a hot water bottle or heat pad and apply the heat to the area ideally twice a day for at least 10 minutes at a time. Be careful not to burn the skin.

Compression – If the injury looks swollen then it may be worth wearing a support bandage on it for a period of time to help reduce the inflammation. If the injury is new i.e you have just sprained your ankle then wear the support for the first 48 hour. After that or if it is a long term problem then just try and wear the support when you are moving around and take it off when you are still as you don't want your muscles to become too dependent on it. Gradually reduce the amount of time you are wearing it as any inflammation subsides.

Elevation – Again if an injury looks swollen then try to keep the injured area elevated as much as you can when you are sitting to help reduce any swelling.

Move – Exercise will really help to stretch and strengthen the muscles and keep you more flexible and supple which in turn will help to reduce pain. Pilates and Yoga are excellent forms of exercise and can really help with mobility. Find something you enjoy and build it up gradually, be it walking, swimming,

cycling or whatever interests you. The human body is designed to move and ideally you should aim to be getting up and moving around every 20 minutes even if it is just a gentle walk around the house, anything is better than nothing. Exercise is the best tonic for most soft tissue conditions but only exercise within your capabilities if it is safe to do so.

Posture – So many soft tissue problems come from poor posture. Now days so many of us spend a lot of time sat at a desk looking at a computer or on our phones or Ipads. This encourages the poor posture we see today in so many people, rounded shoulders, shortening across the Pecs (muscles in the chest) and head protruding forwards. Poor posture in any form can put pressure on the muscular system and cause pain so whilst this is not an easy one as much as you can be mindful of your posture during the day, again Yoga or Pilates can be a great to help with this.

Overuse – Overuse is another very common cause of pain or injury , if this is the case then the best thing to do if it is possible is to take a break from the thing that is causing you pain, this can however be easier said than done, especially if it is you work that is causing the problem! If it is your leisure pursuit that is causing pain (i.e tennis players suffering with tennis elbow) then it may be worth considering cross training so trying a different sport or fitness regime instead for a while. This can either be done by cutting the activity out altogether and doing something different instead or cutting done on the activity that is causing the pain and supplementing it with other things instead. Try this for 2-3 weeks to see if the injury/pain improves then gradually reintroduce the activity back in slowly

Self Massage – This is a great way to help release any muscular tension and reduce pain. If you have a new injury i.e a sprained ankle, then do not do this for at least a week after the injury but this is great for any old injuries or long term pain. The best thing to use is a massage ball they can be purchased quite cheaply online, If you don't have one of these a tennis ball will do. You can either, use your hand to roll the ball around into the muscles or place the ball on the floor, lie on it and roll it around underneath you. You can also put the ball in between yourself and a wall and again roll it around into your muscles. This one can be slightly trickier as the ball may keep falling on the floor. One way to stop this happening is to put it in a long sock or pair of tights so you can keep hold of the end. It saves you having to keep bending over to pick it up if it falls. Foam rollers are also very effective especially on larger areas of the body again these can be purchased online.

If you are doing self massage best to only do it for 10 minutes at a time and only put on as much pressure as is comfortable for you.

Hopefully these tips should help to keep you going in between your massage sessions.