



Soft Tissue Injury Physical Therapy

A **Soft tissue injury** (STI) is the damage of muscles, ligaments and tendons throughout the body. Common soft tissue injuries usually occur from a sprain, strain, a one off blow resulting in a contusion or overuse of a particular part of the body. Soft tissue injuries can result in pain, swelling, bruising and loss of function.

Often soft tissue injuries are some of the most chronically painful and difficult to treat because it is very difficult to see what is going on under the skin with the soft connective tissues, fascia, joints, muscles and tendons.

This area of expertise has become known as **soft tissue therapy** and is rapidly expanding as the technology continues to improve the ability of these specialists to identify problem areas more quickly.

Soft tissue therapy (STT) is the assessment, treatment and management of soft tissue injury, pain and dysfunction primarily of the neuromusculoskeletal system. Repetitive strain injuries (RSI's) – also known as cumulative trauma disorders, or CTD's – of the soft tissues are becoming increasingly prevalent and account for the majority of disability and impairment costs.

Postural and functional assessments

Clients presenting with a specific complaint (or complaints) will generally undergo a number of assessments that each provide information about the soft tissue status of the client. These assessments are conducted according to presenting signs and symptoms, with the purpose helping to identify the most likely cause(s) of the pain or injury. They may include assessments of posture, biomechanics, range of motion, and the nervous system, among others.

Treatment strategies

The specific treatment application of an ache, pain, or injury will be solely reliant on the conclusions reached by the assessments. Any number of treatment techniques may be used to achieve optimal treatment results.

Manual techniques

- Trigger Point techniques provide relief from the pain of Myofascial Trigger points.
- Myofascial Therapy targets the muscle and fascial systems, promotes flexibility and mobility of the body's connective tissues. Likewise, it mobilizes fibrous adhesions and reduces the severity and sensitivity of scarring caused by injury or surgery.
- Massage techniques, traditionally known as Swedish massage, may be used as part of a treatment application. Referred to, in Soft Tissue Therapy, as broad-handed techniques, this mode of treatment aims to reduce swelling and/or inflammation.
- Cross friction create heat, which in turn provides the impetus for the mobilization of adhesions between fascial layers, muscles, compartments and other soft tissues. Frictions are also thought to create an inflammatory response that instigates a focus to an injured area, thereby, promoting healing, especially in tendon pathologies.
- Soft Tissue Technique, the technician applies firm, direct pressure to relax hypertonic muscles and stretch tight fascial structures.
- Sustained Pressure (ischemic / digital pressure) alleviates hypertonic (tight) areas within muscle and fascia.
- Other Techniques such as Active Release Technique, Myofascial Release and / or Deep tissue massage are all combinations of the techniques listed above. Generally, any one of these techniques alone, or in combination, may provide the solution to an ache, pain, or an injury.

Stretching

- Static stretching attempts to alleviate excessively hypertonic (tight) muscles.
- PNF stretching (proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation) is used in an attempt decrease the tone in a muscle or muscle group that is assessed as being hypertonic (tight).

- To treat DOMS (delayed onset muscle soreness), Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF) is typically used.
- The use of very light muscular contractions, in very specific directions is muscle energy technique (M.E.T.). Refined more than 100 years ago in the field of osteopathy, this technique, alters joint restriction and joint range of motion, through altering the length of local musculature.

Exercise prescription

Dysfunctional soft tissues are either too short and tight or too long and weak. Dependent on assessment findings, some clients may be required to undertake a series of exercises, to strengthen, or simply to “switch-on” particular muscles or muscle groups.

Physical therapists at AdvaCare Clinics treat many injuries to soft tissue. Contact us at 952-835-6653 for a personal consultation.

