



Staying in Touch

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WELLNESS NOTES From Jacky

Hello—

One of the big challenges as a massage therapist is to educate everyone on the scope of benefits that can be attained from regular massage. The subject in this issue (fascia) is a perfect example. Read on to learn about a rarely discussed area of your body.

One of my main goals is to help you discover the many ways that massage can make an important contribution to your overall health. Please let me know if you have any specific questions regarding this subject, or any other health concerns that you think may be affected by massage. I'd be happy to direct you to any references I've come across, or to share with you what I've learned.

One advantage of learning about all these health benefits that massage can provide is that you'll find out how smart you have been to be getting regular massages! I plan on continuing to share more information with you over the coming months and years, so let me know how you like the various subjects presented and feel free to offer any suggestions for future newsletters, etc. See you soon!

Fascinating Fascia...

Do you know what fascia is? Most people have never heard of it, yet it's literally everywhere throughout your body. And the role it plays is an important one.

What is fascia? The World Book Dictionary defines fascia as "a usually thin band of fibrous connective tissue covering, supporting, or binding together a muscle, part, or organ; tissue of this kind." The word comes from the Latin fascia, meaning a band or girdle.



This connective tissue forms a continuous net throughout the body, from head to toe and from skin to the deepest levels. "If all the other tissues were extracted, the connective framework alone would preserve the three-dimensional human form in all its details," writes author and bodyworker Deane Juhan in his book *Job's Body*.

All of the body's components that we are more familiar with—the blood vessels, nerves, muscles, etc.—make their way through this maze of fascia. And found in all the tiny spaces throughout the connective tissue is a fluid called ground substance, a viscous liquid resembling raw egg whites.

Ground substance is the medium in which all those cellular body functions—nutrients and hormones being delivered to cells, wastes being carried away, etc.—take place.

So, what does all this have to do with massage and your overall health? Because fascia is a continuous web spreading throughout your body, it can play a major role in how your body functions. Since it's a gel, ground substance

can change in consistency. When a body is active (through work, exercise, stretching, etc.), it generates heat that creates a more ideal condition for the ground substance—one in which it becomes thinner or more liquid. This allows for better metabolic exchange to take place throughout your body, helping your body to better maintain proper health.

If a body is less active, the connective tissues are not as warmed or energized, allowing the ground substance to thicken; the tissues become sluggish and lose their ability to stretch, soften and flex.

One of the health benefits of massage is the positive effect it has on this process in the body. "(B)y

Fascinating Fascia...

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means of pressure and stretching, and the friction they generate, the temperature and therefore the energy level of the tissue has merely been raised slightly. This added energy in turn promotes a more fluid ground substance ... in which nutrients and cellular wastes can conduct their exchanges more efficiently.”¹



The substance that gives connective tissue its strength is the protein collagen (derived from the Greek word meaning glue). The collagen molecule is the longest molecule that has ever been isolated. These collagen fibers derive their strength from their ability to form strong chemical bonds with each other. Over the years, these fibers tend to pack more tightly and strengthen their bonds, especially in places with more compression and strain. “These areas of chronic stress in the connective tissue thicken and rigidify, bunch up, lose their range of motion, and impose their limitations on the movement of the body as a whole. ... This unwanted bonding is one of the major factors in the stiffness associated with old age, repeated strain, or poorly healed injuries.”¹

Because fascia is continuous throughout your body, when one area is affected (becomes tight, for example), its effects can manifest in other areas as well. Imagine pulling on a corner of your shirt and the numerous distortions this causes across the length of the fabric. Fascia can react in a similar fashion. Areas of restricted fascia can lead to various complaints, such as postural problems and restricted movement.

So, in addition to massage benefiting your tight or sore muscles while soothing and relaxing you, it also is playing another vital health role. “(T)he pressure, motion, and friction created by deep manipulation raises thermal ... levels far beneath the surface. In addition, the squeezing, stretching, and contorting of the connective tissues creates a cleansing, flushing effect, similar to that of rinsing out a sponge... (L)arge amounts of toxins and wastes ... can be thus moved out of the intercellular fluids and into the bloodstream, from which they can then be eliminated.”¹

This information only scratches the surface on fascia and the roles it plays in your body, but it should give you a better understanding of how your regular massage sessions can benefit you. If you have questions, just ask!

1. Deane Juhan, *Job’s Body*, 1987

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Did you know . . . that the term “myofascia” describes the tissues that together comprise muscles. (Myo = muscle) A muscle is composed of muscle fibers, each surrounded by fascia. In turn, bundles of these fibers are also wrapped in fascia, as is the muscle itself—the entire muscle completely interwoven with fascia!

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