

THE NEED FOR FLEXIBLE FASCIA

Understanding the connecting factors

BY MARJORIE BROOK

Fascia is the connective tissue that runs throughout your entire body much like a big cobweb. Its job is to provide a sliding and gliding environment for muscles, to suspend the organs in their proper place and to be the “wiring” for the electrical system inside of the body. Fascia also provides a supportive and mobile wrapping for nerves, blood vessels and lymph vessels as they pass through and between muscles throughout the body.

Since the fascia in our bodies is essentially one continuous piece, any one part is attached to every other part in the body. This connection can manifest problems when you suffer an injury which, if not treated properly, can linger for years. The longer the injury remains, the longer your body will function incorrectly. As time passes, what was just a small damaged area of your fascia will spread throughout neighboring tissues. Suddenly, in areas nowhere near the original site of the injury or impairment, other problems begin to arise.

Here is a little exercise to bring the point home. Let’s imagine that your shirt represents your skin—the outermost layer of the fascia. Take hold of the bottom corner of your shirt and give it a pull. Feel how it moves across your body and then release it. Now with the other hand take hold of a small section anywhere on the shirt. Repeat the pulling action from the bottom corner. Do you feel how the pull has changed? This is what happens when you have a restriction, adhesion or scar in your body. Consequently, a knee problem can be the result of a hip



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restriction, or the pull from a C-section scar can be the cause of lower back pain.

With all this information you may be wondering what it has to do with the fitness industry. Well, just about everything. The first question is this: *Would you and your clients like to increase power and endurance, reduce recovery time and prevent injuries?*

The body, being the amazing compensatory machine it is, will do anything and everything to keep you standing upright and functioning. Performance becomes hindered by fascial restrictions that cause diminished range of motion. Without full range of motion in its joints, the body has to use more energy for every movement. Restoring full range of motion will use less energy for every movement, granting you increased endurance. Recovery time can be adversely affected due to the pressure that restricted fascia places on the circulatory vessels. These lymph and blood vessels deliver nutrients for cellular healing and provide a system for removal of the damaged cells. Flexible fascia prevents injuries and allows you freedom of movement to perform your sport, activity and daily tasks.

Can fascial restrictions reduce the capacity of the cardiovascular system?

Most commonly, the fascia can reduce cardio capacity by restricting the shape or configuration of the body. Consider this: In order to take a deep breath, your shoulders need to be back to lift your rib cage so your lungs can expand fully. Your spine needs to be straight to give the maximal lift to your rib cage allowing the diaphragm to work. Your pelvis needs to be able to hold a neutral position to maintain stability of your trunk. By loosening the restrictions that are pulling you forward, you will find yourself more easily resting upright. This will grant more ease to your heart and lungs throughout your training, giving you the ability to push yourself further and harder.

Are you injured?

As a fitness instructor you are teaching several classes a day. This constant overuse of your body stresses and/or damages the fascia. The stress will show up as tension in the muscles and then along full lengths of the fascial sheets. The damage will show up in the form of adhesions created by scarring. This creates constant pulling from the tight areas of fascia, causing the body to compensate and use other muscles to perform the task at hand, be it a step class or lifting the groceries out of the car. These compensations eventually cause other problems requiring the body to make more adjustments, thus setting up a vicious chain reaction.

AIS and the body

Active Isolated Stretching (AIS) is a scientifically designed flexibility system, pioneered by Aaron L. Mattes, based on fundamental anatomical movements of joints, ligaments and muscles. By taking advantage of physiological laws, AIS creates a system that works with the body, not against it. AIS gently stretches a specific muscle, holds the stretch for two seconds and then releases. This pumping action circulates purifying oxygen into the muscle tissue and flushes out damaging toxins such as lactic acid.

AIS helps the body to become more efficient by increasing joint range of motion and providing muscular re-education through fundamental training of the muscles. By utilizing AIS, individuals become more balanced and less susceptible to injury and capable of promoting their overall well-being.

Routine stretching for a healthy body

Just as you have to instruct your clients on proper strength training, it is no less important to teach them how to stretch properly. Specific stretching classes are rare and should be incorporated into every fitness center's class schedule.

A complementary specific strengthening program that is utilized to create increased local joint stamina and dynamic stability through any range of motion should also be incorporated into every exercise routine. By combining these concepts of flexibility and stability, total body balance is possible.

The importance of fascia and its effects on the body is finally starting to gain recognition. Active Isolated Stretching is based on the principal that fascial restrictions can be eliminated and full range of motion throughout the body can be restored, creating a balanced, healthy body. AF

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