



The Performance Health Centre

TAMING YOUR TENSION

Taming Your Tension

Muscle tension is like a car that's idling too fast. The car is revved up and working hard but nothing useful is happening. There's more wear and tear on the motor. Not only that, but the motor is burning more fuel and creating more pollution.

With muscle tension your muscles are working hard, but are not doing anything that's useful. The tension doesn't help you move and it certainly doesn't make your muscles stronger. It doesn't really accomplish anything at all.

It does, however, cause a lot of wear and tear on your body. It strains the tendons that hold your muscles to your bones. It pulls the joints tighter together which not only causes horrible grinding and crunching sounds, but also causes the cartilage in your joints to wear out. The tension limits your movement, interferes with your coordination and may make you more accident prone.

The tense muscles burn up the fuel in your muscles, making you feel tired. They also create the equivalent of car exhaust – toxic waste products (called metabolites) that fatigue your muscles and make them feel sore and achy.



You know from Experience – Tension is Not Good.

It's important that you get your tension under control. Not only will you feel more comfortable, but you'll also prevent a lot of problems from occurring, from kinks in your neck to early arthritis. To manage your tension, it helps to know what causes it.

MASSAGE TO THE RESCUE

Massage plays an important role in helping you deal with your tension. Your massage therapist, like a mechanic, can adjust how fast your “muscle motors” are idling.

Massage has a twofold action. First, it helps induce a relaxation response in your body. This reduces the common defensive reactions in your body, including that turtle-in-the-shell action of your neck muscles. Relaxation causes your brain and nervous system to slow down and this in turn lowers the tension level of all the muscles in your body.

Secondly, with massage your muscles are pulled and stretched. This physically releases the muscle. In addition, the sensations that your muscles feel, both conscious and subconscious, give your brain information about the level of tension that exists in your muscles. This helps your nervous system to adjust your muscles to a normal level of tone.

The wonderful thing about massage is that its effect on tension is almost instantaneous. You feel the tension leaving your body immediately. You don't have to wait days or weeks to see results.



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However, don't expect long-lasting results from just one massage. Although this may happen, factors like stress and sedentary lifestyle are likely to perpetuate your tension. For this reason regular massage is important. Typically, when you start to get massage, you may experience a great deal of discomfort and your therapist may have to work rather lightly. As your muscles relax and your circulation becomes more normal, the tenderness starts to decrease. Subsequent massages are usually much more comfortable. You may find that you have to ask your therapist to work deeper to get the same level of sensation.



If you find that your muscles are always tender when you visit your massage therapist, it's time to consider getting more frequent treatments and taking a more active approach to managing tension. Regular massage treatments will not only reduce your tension, but they will train your muscles to maintain a lower level of tension or to recover from tension more quickly.

Once your muscles learn what it's like to be relaxed, you can reduce the frequency of your massage treatments. At that point, you can use massage more as a maintenance tool and schedule treatments for the year, just as you schedule regular tune-ups for your car.

How often do you need a tune up? As a general rule, many therapists suggest monthly maintenance treatments. However, there are many factors that determine your need for massage. Since your massage therapist knows you and your body, it's best to ask for specific recommendations.

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