Fascia

Fascia is a network of collagen fibers that covers and connects every structure in our body, from the largest muscles and organs to the smallest arteries, and even the membranes of each cell. It is like a high-tensile plastic wrap that both separates everything in our body, and then holds in it place. Like fascia, tendons and ligaments are also made from collagen; all three are connective tissue. Ligaments join one bone to another, tendons join muscle to bone, and fascia connects muscles to other muscles and to the skin.

From the Greek for glue, *collagen* means "glue producer" and refers to the early process of making glue from animal products. Collagen is a protein which can form long, tough strands. A seamless, continuous web of protein fibers, from skin to tendons to organs, glues the body together and integrates all its structures.

Myofascial release

Myo- is simply Greek for muscle. Myofascial therapy manipulates both muscles and their connective structures to "release" restrictions and achieve long-term improvement to a body's functioning.

Common relaxation massage treats the body by kneading tight muscles and repetitive tactile techniques (e.g. drumming, stroking) on the skin. This lowers the resting tone of the sore muscle and induces relaxation by the feel-good touch. It can include sensory experiences like soothing lotions, aromatherapy, diaphragmatic breathing, and music to alleviate stress and relieve pain.

Therapeutic massage is different in that it doesn't follow a pleasing flow, but rather, just fixes things. It focuses on imbalances of posture, shortened muscles, and restrictions like adhesions or old scars. It treats not just the muscles or the skin, but entire structures to lengthen, separate, or reposition them relative to other structures. It uses little or no oil to get a better grip on the tissues and transmit forces through the skin.

How does it work?

Myofascial therapy can improve posture, correct inefficient movement patterns, and ease chronic pain. For many people, it can be more effective than relaxation massage. Techniques can include manually lengthening tendons and entire muscles; contracting and relaxing muscles during stretches; holding or moving muscles during stretches; and sliding the superficial fascia between the muscles and the skin. Movements are slow and deliberate. There is no pain.

Some practitioners believe that manual therapy can significantly lengthen and repattern fascia. But collagen is extremely resilient material — it has to be, given the huge stresses of pressure and tension placed on tendons. It is unlikely that any real change could be effected in the fascial structure of the body without an aggressive work, like the stretching routines of a gymnast or the focused application of cross-fiber friction. Rather, most benefits of myofascial massage are from *neuro-muscular proprioception,* which just means our body's sense of itself. Pain and tension sometimes has a physical cause in the muscle, like a trigger point, but most tension has a different cause. It is set by the nervous system. The brain itself decides how short and tight, or how long and loose, each muscle is. When we do a daily stretching routine we might be lengthening the collagen network a tiny amount, but mostly we're retraining our brain to accept a longer length for that structure. Tiny sensors in our muscle called Golgi Tendon Organs will gradually allow us to stretch more without triggering pain and the sense of "that's as far as it'll go!"

Another factor is warming up the tissue. Collagen has a property called *thixotropy,* which means that it resists fast movement or changes while it's cold, but gets pliable when it's warm or moved slowly. Warming the soft tissues (layers under the skin, fascia around muscles and tendons) through Swedish massage, hot stones, or slow lengthening induces the sense of release. Once the muscles are in their new position or the fascia has repatterned, the brain will remember this new length and sense of ease. It is a *neuro* + *muscular* change.

History

Myofascial release was first described by the founder of osteopathy, Andrew Still, in the early 1900s when it was called "fascial twist." Physiotherapist Elizabeth Dicke later taught this technique as Connective Tissue Massage, which aimed to stretch the superficial fascia. The most focused study of myofascial techniques was by scientist Ida Rolf in the mid-1900s, who applied her doctoral study of biochemistry to understand the structures of the body. Rolf theorized that fibrous restrictions prevent muscles from functioning in concert with one another and affect movement and posture. Her system of Structural Integration freed these layers by manually separating and lengthening the fibers. *Myofascial* was coined by physician Janet Travell in the 1940s in reference to myofascial trigger points, or muscle knots. The term *myofascial release* originated with physiotherapist John Barnes in 1970s, where *release* eloquently captures the sense of the tension "letting go".

During these years myofascial therapy was only taught privately by osteopaths, physiotherapists, and Rolfers. It wasn't until the 1990s that these theories were introduced to the public via lectures, books, and videos by Art Riggs, Michael Stanborough, and Tom Myers. The field is now emerging as an independent field of inquiry — the world's first International Fascia Research Conference was only held in 2007.

Further reading

A longer version of this brochure is at www.wintersbodyworks.com/myofascial

Articles by John Barnes: www.myofascialrelease.com

Articles by Art Riggs: terrarosa.com.au/dtm/art.htm

"Psychophysiological Effects of Massage: Myofascial Release After Exercise": www.ugr.es/ ~marroyo/inves/JACM%202008.pdf

"Does Fascia Matter? The clinical relevance of fascia": www.saveyourself.ca/ articles/does-fascia-matter.php

Bio

I'm a graduate of Vancouver School of Bodywork and Massage (spa therapy) and Ontario College of Health and Technology (massage therapy). I've been licensed to practice mobile therapeutic massage, have worked as on-site RMT for a seniors' home, and now I work in a number of locations around Niagara and St Catharines, including *The Spiritual Spa.*

see more at wintersbodyworks.com/about

Services

At the Clinic or at my home

60 min	$100, HST incl.
90 min	$140, HST incl.
120 min	$170, HST incl.

Chair massage, on location

$100/hour, 2-hour min.

Corporate & event massage

$100/hour, 2-hour min.

10% of all profits goes to
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What is myofascial massage?

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Myofascial Integration