

## Massage Self-Care Corner

# Stretching



**George P. Kousaleos, LMT**

Since the beginning of my structural-integration career 30 years ago, I have been a proponent of combining stretching and strengthening exercises as a powerful tool that keeps one balanced and energized.

The overall goals of my routine are simple. First, I lengthen the vertical line with standing and floor exercises. I try to lengthen the lumbar and cervical sections of the paraspinals while elevating my sternum. Next, I work on stretching and strengthening the myofascial components of my shoulders and hips. Finally, I complete a series of floor and standing spinal twists that reduce the strain of compression and improve the fluidity of the intervertebral joints.

My favorite tool is the large- or medium-size exercise ball. I use the large ball for full-body hyperextensions, lateral stretches and pelvic balancing. The mid-size ball is great for hip stretches and spinal twists.

I also use small, handheld weighted balls to strengthen my shoulders and arms. I use these tools to help me increase the strength and flexibility of my shoulder girdle.

### Self-Care Tips for Using Exercise and Resistance Balls

*Type:* Midsize ball

*Exercise:* Hip stretch

*How To:* Place the lateral thigh on the center of the ball with the other knee in flexion and lateral leg resting on the ball. Your other leg is positioned directly behind your body. Push slightly forward from the back leg, slowly stretching the hip rotators of the leg on the ball. Maintain balance through the upper body and breath slowly, allowing the intensity of the



stretch to increase while exhaling and slightly resting while inhaling.

*Type:* Handheld weighted balls

*Exercise:* Full-shoulder revolutions – Opposite Windmills

*How To:* With a ball in each hand and both arms raised above the head, begin by bringing one arm forward and the other backward, completing slow circles in either direction. Repeat for five to 10 revolutions before changing direction of each arm.

*Tip:* Start with lightly weighted balls and use the complete breath cycle for each revolution.

**George P. Kousaleos** is founder and president of the CORE Institute School of Massage Therapy in Tallahassee, Fla. He has specialized in structural integration, myofascial therapy and sports bodywork since 1978. He was the first chair of the NCBTMB and served as co-director of the Athens 2004 Olympic Sports Massage Team.

## The Self-Care Wellness Authors



Barry Antoniow



Bruce Baltz



Erik Dalton



Judith DeLany



David Kent



George Kousaleos



Aaron Mattes



Teresa Matthews



Mike McGillicuddy



Sharon Puzsko



Benny Vaughn



James Waslaski