Massage Self-Care Corner

Take Care of Your Foundation

By Aaron Mattes, MS, RKT, LMT

Over the past 40 years, I have spent well more than 200,000 hours in training, conditioning and rehabilitating patients as a kinesiologist, personal trainer and massage therapist. As an author, lecturer and clinical therapist I have worked with thousands of massage therapists. The quality of our work and professional longevity depend on our knowledge and personal health. The foot and ankle are among the most ignored areas of body conditioning as we stretch, strengthen or train aerobically.

The ankle-foot structures are a complex group of joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments and fascia that are designed to hold up the weight of the entire body. The ankle joint is responsible for movement forward (upward) into dorsal flexion and backward (downward) into plantar flexion. The subtalar movements of inversion (adduction) and eversion (abduction) are actions between the tibia, talus and calcaneus bones. Deformities such as hind-foot calcaneous valgus, where the heel turns outward, is often combined with midtarsal phalangeal pronation. Varus heel turns inward is often combined with supination or inward rotation of the midtarsal and phalangeal joints.

Sprains of the ankle or subtalar joints feature ligaments partially or totally torn. Shin splints involve tight calves, painful shins, weak arches, strain tearing of the interosseus membranes between the tibia and fibula and weakness/inflammation of the tibialis posterior and tibialis anterior, both of which are major muscles of the arch. Tight calves are also present with pes cavus (high arch), hammer toes and Achilles tendon problems. Tight calves, including the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles, need to be stretched. The soleus is stretched by bending the knee 90 degrees, placing the hands or an exercise band around the ball of the foot and dorsal flexing the ankle for 10 repetitions with assistance.

To lengthen a tight gastrocnemius muscle, sit with the leg extended and place an exercise band around the ball of the foot with one strand in each hand. Dorsal flex the foot backward and assist with the band for 10 repetitions.

Massage therapists spend countless hours on their feet. The structure of the ankle, subtalar, midtarsal and phalangeal joints requires excellent muscle support. In many cases, orthodox assistance is used to support underdeveloped, overstressed lower leg muscles and joints. Pain and weakness endangers the work schedule and may limit off-hour exercise and planned activities.

Exercise the muscles of the ankle and foot by using an exercise band. Tie one end of the band to something stable and do this:

- Inversion – Face the band from the side. Clasp the band with the foot and then pull the band inward. Perform a number of series of 10 repetitions.
- Eversion – Face the band from the side. Clasp the band with the foot and pull the band outward. Perform several series of 10 repetitions each.
- Plantar Flexion – Face the end of the band. Place one foot on the band and flex the toes as far as possible, release and repeat 10 time. Repeat for a number of sets.
- Using a flexible foot bar – Roll the bar forward with one foot and backward at the same time with the opposite foot. This will exercise the plantar flexors of the foot. You may also turn the foot in or out while performing this maneuver.

Aaron Mattes received his master's degree from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, in 1972, with special emphasis in kinesiology and kinesiotherapy. Contact Aaron with questions or comments regarding this article at **www.stretchingusa.com.**

The Self-Care Wellness Authors

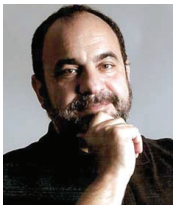

Barry Antoniow


Bruce Baltz


Erik Dalton


Judith DeLany


David Kent


George Kousaleos


Aaron Mattes


Teresa Matthews


Mike McGillicuddy


Sharon Puzsko


Benny Vaughn


James Waslaski