

imbalance or to need help with improving their flexibility. Through using massage, regular assessment of an individual's soft tissues enables a therapist to monitor how their client is responding to training, enabling them to focus on avoiding injury and enhance performance. The nature of a health problem may often determine the most suitable form of massage; sometimes a combination of sports and remedial massage can be effective.

Massage deals with most minor soft tissue conditions, helping the body with its natural repair processes. Remedial massage also has a part to play when there has been an injury involving secondary soft tissue. In this situation, the muscular system may be protecting or compensating for a more serious problem; massage can provide a complementary role supporting primary

treatment and helping overall recovery.

CONSULTATION AND TREATMENT

You will be asked about your medical history, lifestyle, state of health and medication during a first consultation with a masseur. Although the therapy includes assessment of soft tissue, it is important to be aware that initial diagnosis and treatment of any injury or medical condition is the responsibility of your GP. Equally, if seeking the help of a private practitioner, although it is not necessary to have a medical opinion first, should the therapist feel that massage would not be the most appropriate treatment, or they have any other doubts, you will be asked to refer to a doctor before embarking on therapy.

Areas where there is a thick muscle layer, such as the thighs, can deal with a reasonable degree of pressure

and stretching. Others with less muscle cover need to be treated more carefully, or avoided altogether if any pressure causes pain. There should be no discomfort during treatment - if there is, let the practitioner know, so they can adjust the pressure.

People are affected by massage in different ways. During, or immediately after a session, you may feel calm or sleepy, while vigorous treatment can make you more alert, depending on the pressure applied and rhythm used. For a couple of days following massage you may feel some aching, although this should soon wear off.

The psychological benefits are just as relevant to the overall success of massage as the physiological help it offers. It is also worth remembering that the treatment can be used as an injury-preventative. When looking for a practitioner, ensure you choose somebody whose

experience is adequate and appropriate for your needs.

Graham Stones has worked with English National Ballet (ENB) as a sports remedial massage therapist for the last six years. "I came to working in sports massage after many years of training and competing in kung fu. This gave me an appreciation of using physical therapy to heal the body after gruelling training, competition or injury. At this time I began practising – and later teaching – yoga, which led to my undertaking a course in Thai massage, and becoming more involved with physiology, anatomy, massage and later sports massage.

"I continued to study yoga and other forms of bodywork to expand my skills, and in 2008 met Dominic Hickie, the main sports massage therapist for ENB. Since then I have worked with the company providing extra



Graham Stones working with a dancer at English National Ballet.