

help and cover when needed, as well as running a number of clinics in central London, teaching yoga and holding yoga anatomy programmes for yoga teachers.

"Massage therapy is about working with the body's tissues to re-establish better symmetry, tone, balance and function, enabling the dancer to understand the nature of imbalance, and how they can help themselves through corrective movement and exercise.

"A good sports masseur should be able to detect imbalances in the body's tissues helping muscles and joints to function better, causing less strain and potential injury. This increases the range of motion, so more muscle is available to work, reducing load and effort on specific muscles.

"Injury treatment is not the primary role of the sports masseur. When injured, a dancer's first port of call would be the physiotherapist for biomechanical assessment; after this, some physiotherapy and sports massage, or they may just work with the masseur to release acute tension in the muscles and tendons.

"An important part of a masseur's role is to provide treatment prior to an event, especially during busy performance schedules. Some dancers need help to prepare them, to make sure they are warmed up and ready to work, and have proper function in the muscles.

"Post-performance therapy flushes through any build-up of waste products which, if left untreated, can cause tightness in the muscles adding to the feeling of fatigue and heaviness in the body; potentially a contributory factor to injury during performance.

"The dancers I work with are fit, strong and flexible,

although the nature of their work means that common problems or injuries may occur: strain in the muscles of the lower legs, especially with dancers on pointe or demi-pointe. Around the feet and ankles there are some tendonitis issues, while muscle strains in the legs can be due to holding static postures on stage for long periods and then using explosive movements, which can cause micro damage to the muscles.

"Muscular hypertension is another problem resulting from over-work with not enough rest time or physical therapy to restore natural tone and function of the muscle.

"As well as working with the lower legs, feet and ankles, I also spend time around the pelvis, hips, lower back, middle of the back and surrounding muscles as these often spasm easily. Concerns with the upper back, neck and shoulders may be secondary strains, or related to postures held in performance.

"In theory a good sports massage therapist should be able to listen to the needs of a dancer and apply the right level of treatment, as well as offering appropriate advice for their training or aftercare. However, it is easier if you are able to work with somebody who has experience of working with dancers. They will recognise common problems and be aware of the level of treatment to apply: for example, it is important for therapy not to be applied too strongly if the dancer has to work the next day. When the practitioner understands an individual's workload the massage can be tailored to give maximum benefit while enabling them to function effectively.

"Before attending an



appointment, make contact with the masseur to get a feel of whether you think their approach is suitable for you. Check them out thoroughly. Be clear about what you want from the treatment and talk this through with the person you are working with.

"Good treatment involves a relationship between your needs as a dancer and the assessment and judgement of the massage therapist. What you want is not necessarily what you need, equally, what a therapist would like to be able to do may not always be best for a dancer. It is important to work with somebody who understands this relationship, making you feel supported and confident in their hands.

"ENB has been using massage as an essential part of their system for maintaining good health with the dancers for over 20 years. As well as the benefits I have mentioned, massage helps dancers relax, switch off and feel their body in a different way, allowing them to stay balanced and able to move on. They see it as an essential part of recovery from performances. Without treatment it can take three or four days for the muscles to feel fresh again, that time is greatly reduced with the aid of massage, speeding up the body's ability to return to homeostasis." ■

CONTACT

While a number of bodies represent the interests of those involved with practising massage, there is no overall governing body. Several professional groups act as umbrella organisations for the major complementary therapies, including massage.

The Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC) was set up with government support to protect the public by providing a UK voluntary register of complementary therapists. The Council's Register has been approved as an Accredited Voluntary Register by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care. Visit: cnhc.org.uk, email info@cnhc.org.uk or telephone 020 3178 2199.

The General Council for Massage Therapies (GCMT), also known as the Council for Soft Tissue Therapies, is the governing body for massage and soft tissue therapies. This non-profit-making body holds an online directory of therapists, including sports massage. Visit: gcmt.org.uk, email gcmt@btconnect.com or telephone 0870 850 4452.

The Sports Massage Association (SMA) is the association for soft tissue therapists. Full members of the SMA will have undertaken an approved course of education, professional liability insurance, first aid training and must adhere to the Association's code of conduct. A list of practitioners is held by the SMA, and only members are entitled to use the letters MSMA after their name. Visit thesma.org or telephone 0845 459 6031.