

Guide for Self Treatment

Myofascial stretching can increase the speed of your progress and help you to create and maintain lasting changes in your body. Myofascial stretching follows the principles of Myofascial Release, which uses gentle, sustained pressure into the fascial system, which is like a 3-dimensional web that is continuous from head to toe. This stretching differs from traditional stretches in the following ways:

1. Time element. It takes at least 120 seconds for the fascia to begin to engage so you will want to hold your stretches for at least 3-5 minutes to allow releases to occur. Myofascial stretching affects not only the musculature and the elastic components of the connective tissue but also the collagenous component, which allows for a lasting change within the fascial system.

2. Active Elongation. Without the assistance of your therapist, active elongation allows you to engage the fascial barrier which is the point at which you feel the resistance to the stretch.

3. Presence/Awareness. Tune in and allow yourself to be present, feeling for tension and direct your breath into tight or restricted areas. Notice the easing or slack that comes as the release takes place, then elongate into the next barrier and wait patiently for another release to take place. Using your attention in this way will increase the effectiveness of your stretching and enhance your body awareness.

4. Simultaneous Stretching and Strengthening. Active elongation requires that muscle groups opposing tight fascia contract in a sustained, isometric way. This strengthens them and helps to maintain the elongated state of the released tissue.

How does it feel? Myofascial stretching may elicit an array of sensations in the body and these will change as you follow the body further into the tissue, release after release. It can feel like taffy spreading or melting. There can be sensations of burning, ripping, itching, pulsing, tingling or heat. There can be a fluctuation between increased tension and slack in the tissue. The sensations can intensify as a release is occurring and subside as the tissue finds a more open state or releases. As time goes by, you may feel fascia connecting into other areas of your body. This is referred to this as the “fascial voice”. It is your body telling you that there is a relationship between the area you are treating and the part of the body to which the sensation has referred. These are often good areas to explore with further self-treatment. Over time and with practice, you will feel the fascia loosen and change. Until you are able to feel this, trust that if you are holding your stretch for longer than 120 seconds, change is occurring whether you are able to feel it or not.

Can I injure myself? It is impossible to force the fascial system to let go, so trying to do so is counterproductive

and can lead to further injury. As long as the body is softening and giving way then you are doing what the body needs. If the body is resisting, then you are putting too much pressure into an area or using too much effort. Allow common sense to be your guide and back off and slow down when you are not able to relax and breath easily while releasing. If you think that you are working too hard, you probably are. Wait patiently at each barrier for it to release. With this approach, you are allowing the body to find an easier way. If you are staying present with what you are feeling and gently following what you are feeling, you will not injure yourself.