

Myofascial release and manual therapy/therapeutic massage

Introduction

Your provider has referred you for manual therapy and/or myofascial release. These bodywork techniques can release painful muscle tension, improve circulation, increase joint flexibility, and reduce mental and physical fatigue. But the question most people want answered before their first appointment is "What will it actually be like?"

The techniques used during your appointment may include stroking, deep kneading, surface friction, light tapping and joint movement. Specialized techniques are utilized to relieve painful trigger points, relax contracted fascia (the muscles' protective coverings), realign and heal injured tissue, aid lymph drainage, or restore natural balance and flow of energy throughout the body.

Your therapist has completed many hours of education, which included a variety of bodywork techniques, extensive anatomy and physiology, and knowledge of when manual therapy or myofascial release is and is not appropriate. Feel free to ask your therapist about their unique combination of specialized training and education.

What is the first appointment like?

Your therapist will begin by asking you general health questions since there are some conditions for which this therapy is not appropriate. Depending on the primary technique your therapist uses, you may or may not be asked to undress. Your therapist will give you privacy to undress and you are normally covered except for the area being worked on.

You will lie on a padded table designed for stability and comfort. Your therapist may offer cushions or an adjustable face rest for support. The room will be warm and quiet, often with soft music playing. For many techniques your therapist will use a lubricant, such as light oil or lotion, which is good for your skin and absorbs well. For some kinds of bodywork, no oil is used.

A session usually begins with relatively gentle pressure to calm your nervous system and begin releasing superficial tension. Gradually your therapist works more deeply to address specific areas.

What should I do during my therapy session?

Make yourself comfortable. If your therapist wants you to adjust your position, you will be informed. Otherwise change your position anytime to make yourself more comfortable. Many people just close their eyes and relax completely during a session; others prefer to talk. Do not hesitate to ask questions at any time. The desire to sigh or take a deep breath is a sign that you are relaxing.

How will this therapy feel?

Manual therapy or myofascial release on healthy tissue feels good. The normal response is to slow down, breathe deeply and relax.

The saying "no pain, no gain" is not true for this type of therapy. The most effective and deepest therapy works with the body's natural responses, not against them. Working in the area of an injury or chronic pain may at first cause some discomfort, which usually lessens in the first few minutes. Your therapist knows ways to minimize pain, and will work carefully within what feels right to you. Always tell your therapist if you feel any discomfort.

What should I expect afterwards?

Manual therapy and myofascial release can profoundly affect all your body's systems. Give yourself a moment to reorient before slowly getting up. After a session most people feel very relaxed. Many experience freedom from aches and pains. After an initial period of feeling slowed down, some people often experience an increase in energy that can last for several days. Sometimes you may not feel dramatic results right away. Watch for changes over the course of your prescribed therapeutic treatment.