



CANADIAN SPORT MASSAGE THERAPISTS ASSOCIATION ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES MASSOTHÉRAPEUTES DU SPORT

June 8, 2009

In recent weeks, there has been widespread coverage regarding a study by Queen's University researchers demonstrating that deep tissue massage does not facilitate the removal of lactic acid and the increase of local blood flow under post event treatment conditions. The CSMTA has recently followed up with the lead researcher, Michael E. Tschakovsky, PhD, who is an Associate Professor in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen's University, to clarify the findings of the research, which will be published in the next issue of the American Sports Medicine Journal.

It is our position and also that of Dr. Tschakovsky, that the scope of the research was limited to the mechanical effects of a specific massage technique under particular circumstances and does not invalidate the use of sport massage as a method of improving recovery after activities.

The study investigated the theory that deep tissue massage, when used immediately after an activity, will remove lactic acid from the muscles and improve blood flow. To test this hypothesis, the research subjects asked subjects to perform hand grip exercises, which were immediately followed by active rest, passive rest or deep tissue massage. The massage was performed by an RMT who treated only the forearm area with 10 minutes of effleurage and petrissage techniques. Results found that active rest was most effective and that the massage applied actually hindered arterial blood flow to the area and showed no discernable change in the uptake of lactic acid.

The CSMTA supports the results of research projects such as that done by Dr. Tschakovsky's team as it provides valuable understanding of the mechanical effects of massage. We do not feel that the results of this specific study are contradictory to the continued use of massage in general or sport massage in particular as its focus was on the effects of "deep tissue massage" to a local area of the limb.

Notably, CSMTA Sport Massage Therapists are trained not to use deep tissue massage in an immediate post event environment. Years of sport massage practice have demonstrated that it does not improve recovery and generally leads to soreness. In fact, this study confirms this position as results showed exactly that response.

Also, previous research (Hemming et al., 2000, *British Journal of Medicine* and Dolgener et al., 1993 *Journal of Strength Training and Conditioning Research*) has shown that following anaerobic exercise an active cool down is more beneficial than massage or rest for recovery. Claims regarding the use of massage therapy to increase regional blood flow and thus remove lactic acid are not supported by research.

Clarifying the exact impact of specific massage techniques is valuable and necessary for our profession. There are many different types of massage used to treat athletes in immediate and longer term post event timelines to help improve recovery. Post event massage in practice also follows the principles of massage (i.e. proximal/distal/proximal; periphery/centre/periphery, etc.), which was not the case in this

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study. Benefits of massage are many and varied from reducing the effect of DOMS, reducing muscle contraction and promoting relaxation. It is important for Sport Massage Therapists to understand the different physiological demands athletes experience during training and competition and how we can best treat them in each situation.

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