

Myofascial Release and Its Relationship to Connective Tissue

by Jean Louise Green, Certified Rolf Practitioner and CMT

Fascia or connective tissue does what its name implies. It connects every part in the body to all the other parts. It connects bones to bone, muscles to bones, muscles to muscles. You've probably heard it referred to by other names, that is, cartilage, ligaments and tendons. Connective tissue gives the human body its form. Fascia controls the shape that muscles sustain. It binds, separates, encapsulates and supports every muscle, organ, and cavity of the body.

When you trim a raw steak or eat a cooked steak and find that whitish sheet of stretchy thin tissue between natural sections of the meat, that's connective tissue. The clear membrane underneath the skin of a chicken is also fascia.

Inside your body, connective tissue is critical. This incredibly flexy stuff holds everything in place—tiny cells, small muscles, little bones, big muscles, entire organs. It gives shape to the human body. It gives the body form and space in which internal body parts can function normally. It holds everything very gently. It wraps without squeezing. Bones and skeleton determine a person's height. Muscles give a person strength and bulk. Connective tissue creates the body's space.

Every human body, including the body's connective tissue system, endures a normal amount of daily wear and tear. But when connective tissue becomes stressed, it shortens and thickens, and it does so every day, depending on the kinds of activities you do. Usually, a good night's sleep and sufficiently healthy lifestyle help the connective tissue return to normal the next day

When connective tissue can't bounce back on a one-day turnaround, it continues to shorten and thicken, not just at the place it is overworked or stressed, but everywhere. Common sensations include: tight muscles, tingling, soreness, loss of strength, buzzing, aching, throbbing, numbness and pain. These are the major symptoms of myofascial strain.

Myofascial strain is directly linked to a loss of space in the body. Most people who experience problems like carpal tunnel syndrome or constant shoulder pain say they quit moving that particular part of the body because it hurts so much. It tingles at night. It feels numb. It aches 24 hours a day. Every movement produces soreness or tightness. Why? Because the connective tissue in those related areas have shortened and thickened. The body has lost the space in its connective tissue that allows for normal range

of motion that is necessary for healthy, pain-free tissue. If left untreated, the connective tissue in areas of myofascial strain may continue to shrink and shorten because of the lack of removal of waste products in that area and also the inability of that area to receive proper cellular nutrition. And if connective tissue in a specific spot is negatively affected, connective tissue elsewhere will suffer by virtue of its connection. When people

compensate for pain, it makes the entire pain situation even more complex because so many body parts, movements and habits are involved.

Myofascial release helps to rehydrate the connective tissue. The two major components of fascia or connective tissue are collagen and ground substance. Collagen is comprised of strands of protein that give fascia its shape, tensile strength and resiliency. Ground substance is the nutritive component of fascia. It is the liquid medium through which nutritional exchanges take place in the connective tissues. Ground substance has also been called interstitial fluid, or lymph. Fascia or connective tissue responds to stress by dehydrating, shortening and thickening. During myofascial release, a rehydration occurs within the connective tissues. Through the pressure of the practitioner's hands, the ground substance within the fascial cells softens from a solid gel to a more fluid state. Through the softening and lengthening of these tissues, both the muscles and bones of the body can be brought into better balance that can also lead to beneficial postural change. The effects of myofascial release are as varied as the people receiving the treatment. Benefits include better cellular nutrition and elimination of toxins from the tissues, increased range of motion, improved posture and freedom from pain.