

Is Massage Therapy More than a Back Rub?

by Adam Milligan, EQUIVITA

The concept of massage therapy is to achieve relaxation and release of tissues in the body. There are a variety of methods just as there are a variety of reasons why the tissues become overly tight. The belief, however, that release of the tension is all that is necessary tends to fall into the same category as thinking that we all have “textbook bodies”. If you spend an excessive amount of time in an awkward position- say you sleep funny one night and you wake with a sore neck, massage can relax the muscles and ease the pain and increase your range of motion. But what if you had your neck in that position for months or years? Over time you would not only have the overly tight muscles that are now used to that position and the connective tissue that is also adapted to it, but the opposing muscles have also developed to the “new normal” position. When these physical adaptations happen massage that focuses on the release of the tension is no longer enough.

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Example: Imagine that there are 3 people on each end of a rope in a tug-of-war match that is equally balanced. If we remove a person from one side the opposite side would become far stronger and the rope would be pulled in their direction. Now what if the side with only 2 people decides that they don't want to lose and they start pulling hard enough to rebalance the match? An observer walking up on this match

might think it looks fairly balanced because the rope is not being pulled more in one direction. But a closer look would show that one side was working harder to maintain the balance. What would happen if you got the side that was working harder to relax?

All too often this is the approach used by Massage Therapy when addressing muscles in the body and just like the tug-of-war example, if you get the side that is working harder to relax it doesn't address the problem. Certainly the muscles would feel better with massage, but it would only be temporary and the same tightness, tension and pain would return and might even be more intense. Again, think about how far that tug-of-war rope would move when the 2 person side starts to relax.

Thankfully, there is a better way. An approach that using the same situation gets very different results. Results that last. This approach is to understand that the side that is working harder might be doing so in response to the actual stress. The location of the tension, or pain, might be just a response to the imbalance. In the same tug-of-war match the focus would be on relaxing the side with the 3 people allowing the match to remain balanced while the 2 person side eases. Of course, inside the body it gets far more complicated but the same basics hold true. The human body, your body, is incredible at adapting and the physical sensations do not always tell the whole story. An EQUIVITA Massage Therapist is a professional trained to listen to you and to see the whole picture of your body. This approach is more effective, and more lasting.

The tug-of-war is easy to visualize, but when we put it back into the body it is a little too simplified. There are many more “players” on the field and the actions, and reactions, over time become far more complex. It is for this reason that the EQUIVITA approach includes the team of professionals with different areas of expertise. Each of us has a unique perspective and by working together we can ensure to use the right tool for the job.

