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January 26, 2010

ART Therapy - Active Release Techniques for Strength Athletes

by Mike Westerdal of CriticalBench.com



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At some point or another just about every bodybuilder and athlete on the planet is bound injure himself. Luckily, for most of us they're usually minor and don't result in anything more than a slight inconvenience for a few days. Sometimes though-especially if you're a powerlifter, strongman or competitive athlete-they can stretch on for weeks or months and even bring your training to halt. Some strength athletes though, have found lasting relief for formerly debilitating injuries through a technique known as Active Release Techniques (ART).



ART is a soft-tissue chiropractic technique that specifically targets the injured area. Feedback on ART has so far been very positive. Because of the way it's administered some people might say that ART therapy is a "massage," but make no mistake-it's not. ART therapy is a movement-based technique that is actually patented. It was developed in the early- to mid-nineties by a Colorado Chiropractor P. Michael Leahy, DC, CCSP. He developed the technique after observing that his patients' symptoms were apparently related to changes in the soft tissue that he could actually feel with his hand.

Based on that observation he began tracking how the soft tissues (muscles, fascia, tendons, ligaments and nerves) responded to different types of treatments (soft tissue work). From there he developed the ART program-which is made up of more than 500 different specific moves to treat problems with muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia and nerves, back pain, shoulder pain, sciatica,

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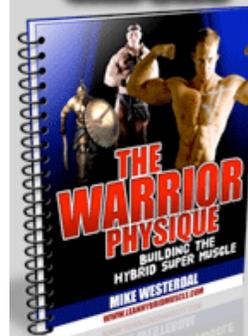
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... knee problems, tennis elbow and more. Nearly all of these are pains that can be common among strength athletes like strongmen, powerlifters and other competitive athletes.

A lot of these problems are caused by soft tissue injuries that usually occur in one of two ways: acute conditions (pulls, tears, strains, etc.); or accumulation of small tears caused by doing the same movement over and over (micro-trauma). When these things happen, they can cause the body to produce dense scar tissue in the areas affected. The scar tissue builds up and as it does, the impact it has becomes more widespread. As a result, we suffer from a reduced range of motion, a loss of strength and of course, pain.

When these kinds of injuries occur in a strength athlete-especially one who is competing-it can be devastating because our tendency is to "work through the pain." But what happens then is we overcompensate because of the pain and wind up not only exacerbating the original injury but often times, we end up with more than we had in the beginning.

So in these kinds of circumstances, ART therapy can be ideal for the strength athlete. It starts with a comprehensive evaluation by a certified therapist. The evaluation takes about an hour. Its purpose is to pinpoint the injury, determine its severity and then establish the proper therapeutic regimen. ART therapy works by treating the abnormal tissues (scar tissue) by combining precisely-directed tension combined with very specific movements from the patient. The big benefit here is that the treatments can generally alleviate the problem after just a few visits. That means no lengthy down times.



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I've read about all kinds of strength athletes-powerlifters and strongmen included, that have had tremendous success alleviating persistent, chronic pains with ART therapy. And in the majority of cases that I've seen, the treatment time has been relatively short-from two to six weeks. After that, they've jumped right back into competition-pain free.

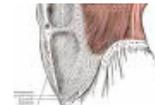
There have been several scientific studies conducted to determine how effective ART therapy actually is in treating injuries relating to the overuse of muscles. Nearly all of the studies show that ART therapy can be very effective in treating these types of injuries. One study conducted at the University of California (San Diego) showed a 71% success rate. Other studies obtained similar results with rates of success ranging from 70% to more than 90%. In these studies, most participants said that the problem was eliminated after 3 to 7 sessions.

Now obviously, a therapy like this is not going to be 100% successful for every person who tries it. Some injuries are more severe than others, are related to other problems or issues, or for some other reason it just doesn't work. But, with research showing that in more than 70% of the cases studied, ART therapy effectively eliminated the problem and enabled these athletes to get back to training, I'd say that this is one technique that is definitely worth investigating if you've got an injury that is holding you back.

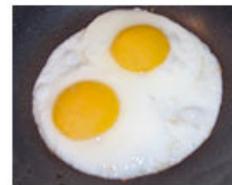
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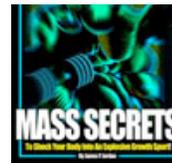
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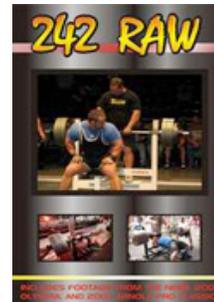
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