

Maintain your Mobility with a Massage.

By David Hall, Qualified Massage Therapist

Personal unhindered mobility is one thing we all take for granted - until we lose it.

When pain in the ankles or feet makes it too sore to walk, or it is painful to stand or move because of knee problems, we suddenly realise just how much influence these areas have on our daily lives and activities.

Although arthritis or injury - like torn ligaments or tendons - are common "anti-mobility" ailments, quite often it is simply a combination of muscular factors causing or influencing pain in the ankles, feet or knees.

Mobility Muscles.

For want of a better term, let's call these the "mobility muscles."

Remedial massage can usually play a major role in either healing or significantly alleviating these problems.

For successful treatment, however, it is important - as in most cases of remedial massage - to consider the "big picture" and look at ALL the muscles affecting the movement of the hips, thighs, knees, legs, ankles and feet, because they are all closely interconnected.

Whoever made up the little ditty that goes something like "The toe bone's connected to the foot bone's connected to the leg bone's connected to the knee bone...." was spot on.

In an article such as this it is difficult to avoid using some medical jargon to talk about mobility muscles. Major leg muscles like Hamstrings, Quadriceps and "Calves" are fairly well known, but there are numerous others with less well known names and actions which also play a key role in movement and stability of the legs and feet - and therefore of the entire body.

Always remember that it is the feet, ankle and knee joints which support the entire weight of the body. Problems with these areas will cause compensatory effects throughout the whole body.

Muscles to Massage.

Starting from the top (of the hips), here's some mobility muscles which, in most cases, should be



massaged to comprehensively and effectively treat leg, knee or feet problems:

One joint hip flexor (Iliopsoas) muscles - from the side of the spine from about mid-back across the front of the hips to the top of the femur (thigh bone).

When the hip flexor muscle on one side of the body pulls tighter than the other, it tilts the hip laterally (upwards) on that side, causing various imbalances in most leg muscles.

One leg will hang slightly in adduction, the other in abduction, even though this may not be evident or noticeable to the untrained eye.

Buttocks muscles (mainly Gluteus Maximus, Medius and Minimus and Piriformis) which play a key role in medially and laterally rotating the thigh (turning the leg inwards and outwards) and extending the hip. These consequently will turn the knee and feet away from their proper alignment, also creating imbalances in leg muscles and exerting unequal forces on the knee joint and feet, in particular the arches.

Two-joint hip flexor muscles (Tensor Fascia Latae/Iliotibial Band - ITB, Rectus Femoris (main Quadriceps muscle) and Sartorius. These muscles get their "two joint" name because they go both across the hip joint and the knee joint.

All the muscles of the thigh and lower leg, some of which go across the knee joint. It is important to remember most of the muscles that go right to the tips of the toes extend up to just below the knees. So when trying to massage out a foot or ankle problem, it is important to follow the muscles right up to the knees.

Feet Arches.

Last, but certainly not least, are the feet arches. Flat feet will cause the legs to medially rotate (turn inwards) at the knees. High-arched feet will cause the legs to laterally (turn outwards) - again causing imbalances in the knees.

If you are being treated for leg, knee, ankle or feet aches and pains which you consider to be related to muscle imbalances (rather than to specific injury) and your practitioner does not include all the above factors, ask him or her why not.

Of course, injuries like muscle tears and strains, post-operative recovery procedures, arthritis and gout - will require more specific or specialised treatments.

Some people put up with leg or other problems for years - assuming nothing can really be done - when they may simply be related to a combination of tight muscles and easily treated by looking at the "big picture."

Try a remedial massage with one of our therapists and find out.

