

Ask Mr. “Muscles ‘R’ Us”- Column II

By Lou Lombardo, LMT, NCTMB

I warned you when I wrote the first question and answer column that there might be a second one. And despite your protests, here’s yet another edition of “Ask Mr. Muscles ‘R’ Us”.

I had just completed some orthopedic massage techniques on the hamstrings of a SUNY Geneseo athlete and she asked an interesting question. She asked if she should ice the area that I had just treated. And my answer was “No”.

Icing an injury may be okay when done within 24-48 hours from the time of the injury. But this slows down the circulation to that area. I just purposely sped up the circulation of blood to her hamstrings by applying myofascial release and cross fiber friction. I wanted to get more oxygen and nutrients to those hamstrings to help speed up their recovery. That’s one benefit of massaging muscles.

So ice may be nice for fresh injuries and mixed drinks, but not after deep muscle work.

A high school student was interviewing me as part of her job shadowing experience and she asked me if there were any disadvantages to being a massage therapist. I assured her that I was quite happy with my chosen profession but there is one requirement that annoys me somewhat.

Massage therapists have to have short fingernails. No white should be showing. There are two reasons for this. The first reason has to do with the client’s comfort.

In the process of giving a massage, the tips of our fingers come in contact with the client. As we glide across muscles, we don’t want to be causing pain or discomfort by scratching the client. That defeats the purpose of a massage, which is, in part, to provide relaxation.

And we don’t want to create a situation similar to what happened when Ricky Ricardo said to his wife after she came home with scratches on her arm, “Lucy, you’ve got some ‘splaining’ to do!”

The second reason has to do with the therapist’s hygiene. When applying the various strokes of massage there is always the possibility that dead cells or other materials on the client’s skin can accumulate underneath long fingernails. And you can scrub with anti-bacterial soap all day and you might still leave some of that under your nails. This can be unhealthy to the therapist as well as their next client. So, long nails are out.

Now, you may say to yourself- what's so bad about having short fingernails? Well, did you ever try to pick up a dime on the sidewalk with no fingernails? I don't know about you but when I pick up a dime I want it to be as unnoticed as possible. I just walk up to it, reach down tie my shoe or, if I have loafers on I scratch my ankle, and pick up the dime all in one motion. You can't do that with short nails! You'd be there all day trying.

Nickels are a little easier and nowadays pennies aren't worth the effort. Although in my youth a penny would buy you 3 sticks of Chum Gum or a red hot jaw breaker.

Paper clips are just as difficult to pick up.

And some people, not me, are known to use the nail of their pinkie to probe their proboscis, if you know what I mean. Can't do it with short nails so I'm told.

While doing chair massage one time, a client said that she thought she had carpal tunnel syndrome. She described the symptoms and asked me if she should relieve the pain by rubbing her wrists.

I said, "No". That would only further irritate the area that is occupied by tendons and the median nerve.

This nerve exits the spinal column at C-7, C-8 and T-1 (the base of the neck) and travels down the middle of your arm. If it is compressed by anything along it's route, it will create symptoms indicative of carpal tunnel syndrome (ie. pain and/or tingling in 1st, 2nd and 3rd fingers and pain in the anterior wrist and palmar surface of the hand).

Most of the time that compression is in the wrist area and is caused by repetitive use of your flexor muscles in the forearm. The tendons of these muscles and the median nerve run through the carpal tunnel in your wrist. When they become irritated from all that flexing, they press on the median nerve, thus causing the pain and tingling.

The best way to alleviate that pain is to use stripping techniques to the flexor muscles. This will help relax them and reduce the irritation of their tendons.

Orthopedic massage should also be applied further up the arm in case the compression is caused by muscles in that area. The cause for carpal tunnel syndrome isn't always located in the wrist.

In one of my columns I had mentioned that I was involved in politics a while back and someone came

up to me in the store and asked me what it was like to be city council president for all those years. I told him that I felt the same as the man who was tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail. And when asked how he felt he replied, "If it wasn't for the honor of the thing I would rather have walked."

In politics you can rub people the wrong way. It's the opposite with massage therapy.

(Lou Lombardo is a NYS Licensed Massage Therapist, nationally certified by the NCBTMB and is a certified Strength Training Specialist. For questions, comments or further information you can contact him at (585) 734-2200 or by e-mail at lombardolm@aol.com)