

Self Myofascial Release Therapy and Athletes

By Angelo Castiglione

Self Myofascial Release Therapy (SMRT) is an extremely effective integrated method of giving Myofascial Release to oneself, whilst simultaneously increasing flexibility, core strength, stability and improving posture. As the tension in the fascia is released and the trigger points are removed, joint function improves which instantly increases strength. There's no other technique like it which works on so many things at the one time!



Kinetic chain

To understand the benefits of SMRT, an understanding of the Kinetic Chain is required. The kinetic chain is made up of the soft tissue system (muscle, tendon, ligament, and fascia), neural system (nerves and CNS), and articular system (joints) ⁽¹⁾

The kinetic chain works as an integrated functional unit. All components of the kinetic chain exist interdependently. If one segment is not functioning efficiently, then the other components must compensate, leading to tissue overload, fatigue and faulty movement patterns and finally initiating the **Cumulative Injury Cycle** ^(2, 3, 4, 5). For example, muscle tightness restricts the range of motion that a joint may be moved. Because of muscle restriction (tightness, soft tissue adhesions, and neural-hyperactivity), joint motion is altered, thus changing normal neural feedback to the CNS (central nervous system). Ultimately, neuromuscular efficiency is compromised, which leads to poor movement patterns, inducing premature fatigue and causing injury. SMRT helps improve muscular balance and performance.

Scar tissue

SMRT works to break down scar tissue, whether it may be as a result of an injury or from surgery; it rejuvenates muscle tissue for a better functioning body.

Functional Testing

SMRT is a form of testing in itself. It tests for function, as where there is tension, restriction, discomfort and clunky moving joints, there's dysfunction and problems which can lead to injury.



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Performing some simple functional movements on a foam roller gives excellent release and relief and provides a wonderfully precise indication of the presence of any biomechanical problems.

Anywhere- Anytime Tool

Athletes need a tool that releases their own Myofascia which can be done anywhere and at anytime and is particularly valuable with youth development. The earlier that muscular imbalances are corrected the better, as this prevents compounded tension building up over the years which restricts full range of movement and, hinders performance, which can ultimately lead to injury.

Dominant Side Sports

Dominant side sports, can mean players develop a significant degree of tightness on a single side. **SMRT** will work to release this tightness and create, better body balance improving function. Again, the earlier this is addressed the better.

Release Restrictions Prior To Activity

SMRT is extremely effective in freeing up tightness and knots immediately prior to exercise, too, used before a training session, game or event to increase range of motion and thereby improve overall performance. **SMRT** will unlock blocked tension in the form of trigger points and facial tightness and leave the body feeling extremely light and energetic, resulting in better performance. It also assists to innervate muscles and increase muscle-firing prior to activity.

Balances Compensations

SMRT balances compensations developed through injury. The opposite sides of injured areas normally do more work to compensate for the weakness of the injured side, which leads to the non-injured side being tighter from the extra use. It is very common for the non-injured side to get neglected through injury and then end up more vulnerable to injury itself.



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SMRT v Stretching

In comparison with stretching, **SMRT** is far more effective in freeing up muscles and joints. However, combined with dynamic stretching (also known as mobilisers), it becomes even more effective, as **SMRT** allows for more successful dynamic movement patterns after the fascia and trigger points have been released.

Recovery

SMRT is effective in increasing recovery times and relieving muscle soreness, just as massage does. It works well as a cool down tool, and is an effective way of releasing tension and tightness directly after exercise, restoring muscle length prior to activity. The earlier it is performed post-exercise, the more effective it will be.

An Excellent Corrective Exercise Tool

SMRT is extremely useful in corrective exercise programmes and is the first of a three step process. First, perform **SMRT** to relieve fascia and trigger points from an area. Second, follow up with various forms of stretching. Finally, finish off with a strengthening exercise to set the Kinetic Chain in the newly gained range of motion. An analogy which I often use to describe this is in the making of cement. Sand and water represent **SMRT** and stretching in that, together, they can be moulded into a shape. This shape, however will eventually collapse because it doesn't have the strength, i.e. the cement, to hold itself in its moulded shape. The cement represents the strength training component to set the kinetic chain into the newly moulded positioning.

Team Applications

SMRT is an enormously effective exercise during team or group briefings, as all athletes can be releasing at the same time. In addition, it can be used while sportspeople are studying opponents, as **SMRT** can be easily performed whilst viewing footage, making this time even more productive.

Inexpensive

SMRT is an inexpensive method of releasing one's own everyday tension which builds up with athletes. Most athletes can't afford massages everyday or even every week. Instead, with **SMRT**, you effectively have a 24-hour release tool at one's convenience—with the athlete knowing exactly where his or her own trigger points lie. **SMRT** can also be used as many times as is needed. For example, endurance sports develop a great volume of muscular contractions, hence tightness. It would take hours of hands-on time to release this tightness, which would be extremely expensive without knowing the **SMRT** techniques.



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Easy Integration in Everyday Life

Most exercises can be performed whilst watching TV, DVD's and talking on the phone with friends (with any hands-free device, like a cordless or mobile phone) and some of them can be performed whilst reading, whilst surfing on the internet (using a laptop) or whilst studying. Its application and integration is endless!

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