

The Four Best Types Of Massage For Runners

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Learn more about timing, frequency and which type of massage is best for your situation.

Most runners love to get a massage. Not only does it feel great, but it can also help speed recovery, reduce muscles soreness and facilitate injury healing. There is, however, a lot of confusion when it comes to massage. Typical questions include:

When is the best time to get one?

Which type is best for runners?

What common mistakes should I be wary of?

Having been a massage therapist for four years, I had the opportunity to work with a lot of runners. Not only did this experience help me identify a lot of the common questions and misconceptions about massage, but it also allowed me to test a variety of theories when it comes to the optimal timing, pressure, and massage modality.

VIDEO: The Benefit Of Massage For Runners

In the following pages I will share with you some of the different types of massage for runners and explain when to effectively utilize which type. I'll also outline when, and how often, you should schedule a massage to ensure you get maximum benefit without impacting your workouts or races.

Which type of massage is best for runners?

It's not surprising that runners get confused about what type of massage would benefit them most. Depending on where you look, there are over 30 different types of massage identified on the internet. Of course, some of these styles are obviously not specifically beneficial to athletes, but runners can go beyond the typical "sports massage" to get results. The following are the four most beneficial types of massages for runners:

Active Release Technique

Active Release Technique, commonly known as A.R.T., is a massage technique that combines movement with specific, deep pressure to help relieve muscle adhesions and reduce scar tissue buildup.

During an A.R.T. session, the therapist uses his or her hands to evaluate the texture, tightness and mobility of the soft tissue and then works to break up these adhesions with their hands, as well as movement of the muscle.

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Active release is best for treating a specific injury, especially one where the formation of scar tissue impacts the ability for the body to heal itself. Most notably, A.R.T. is an effective treatment method for **hamstring injuries**, **plantar fasciitis**, and shin splints.

Swedish Massage

Swedish massage is perhaps the most well known of the common massage modalities and is often associated with relaxation and pampering. However, Swedish massage can also benefit runners, especially before big competitions.

Swedish massage utilizes long, flowing strokes of various pressure, although usually light, to release muscle tension and increase blood flow.

Swedish massage is best used in the days before big competitions or as a recovery tool after hard workouts. The lighter, relaxing strokes help relieve stress and muscle tension without damaging the muscles, which is important if you have a big race on the horizon. A Swedish massage before a race, especially if you're coming off a hard week of training, can help you reenergize, relax, and get your legs back under you.

Trigger Point

Trigger point therapy is a massage modality that targets muscle knots and areas of referred pain in the muscle tissue. Therapists target and find knots in the muscles or areas of referred pain and use deep pressure to help loosen the adhesions.

Like A.R.T., trigger point therapy is best used to treat injuries. Specifically, trigger point therapy is effective in the treatment of IT band tightness, calf strains, and hamstring injuries.

Deep Tissue Massage

Most runners are familiar with deep tissue massage, which is often confused with deep pressure (e.g., when you tell the therapist to "go harder"). Deep tissue massage targets both the superficial and deep layers of muscles and fascia and are often quite intense as a result of the deliberate, focused work.

Deep tissue massages typically focus on a few specific problem areas and, unlike

trigger point therapy, work the entire muscle. Because runners often have tight spots and interconnected issues when volume and intensity are high, deep tissue massage is often the modality of choice during hard training segments.

How often should you get massage?

The frequency at which you get massage work done is completely up to you and depends on how much you like massage, how hard you're training, and your budget.

If you're able to afford it, getting a monthly or weekly massage can help prevent injuries by catching tight areas before they become problematic. If it isn't possible to fit a recurring massage into your schedule (or budget), consider getting one or two during your hardest training block or if you're doing a lot of speed work, which tends to elicit injuries that can be treated by massage, like tight hamstrings or hips.

I always recommend that runners get a massage either the evening after a hard workout or the following morning. If the therapist is going deep or using methods like A.R.T., the muscles can often be sore or lethargic for a few days after a massage. Timing the massage as close to your last hard workout as possible allows your body the most amount of time to recover and feel back to normal.

If you plan on getting a massage before your next big race, schedule it at least 3 to 5 days out from the race. If it's been a while since your last massage, make it a week to ten days. Also note that the deeper the massage, the longer it takes for the body to recover and respond – just like running workouts.

Misconceptions And Things To Watch Out For

Keeping the above guidelines in mind, here are a few common mistakes runners make with massage:

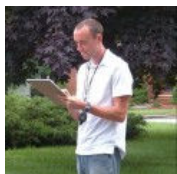
* **Not drinking enough water.** Drink lots of water after the session to help flush out some of the toxins and waste products that were released from the muscles. Some people have reported getting sick after hard massage sessions. Generally, this means the muscles released a lot of toxins. Drinking lots of water will clear them out.

* **Massage has to hurt.** Massage doesn't have to hurt to be effective. While working on a tight, troubled area will certainly cause some discomfort, it shouldn't leave bruising or cause you to jump off the table. If you do find yourself consistently bruised after massage sessions, your therapist may be going too hard.

It takes time to recover and not feel lethargic after a hard massage. If your legs feel a little dead the next day, that's OK. This is why it's important to schedule at least one easy day between a hard massage and a hard workout.

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Jeff has been running for 13 years, at all levels of the sport. He was a two time Division-I All-American in Cross Country while at Brown University and competed professionally for 4 years after college for the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project. Jeff's writing has been featured in Running Times magazine, Endurance Magazine, as well as numerous local magazine fitness columns.

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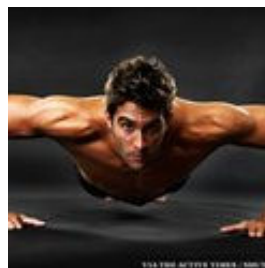
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