

# INNER CIRCLE Insights

## Fascia & Myofascial Release

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Several decades of research have demonstrated that the body operates in a state of total biomechanical integration; nothing happens in the body that is not reflected globally. Just as the foundation of a house affects the pitch of the roof, the levelness of the pelvis affects the function of the shoulder complex. Unfortunately, traditional medicine and therapy have been unable to approach the body as a whole due to the linear, mechanistic view of the body as a collection of parts. One of the primary reasons for this is the seeming separation of systems within the body – cardiovascular, neurological, musculoskeletal, etc. If only there was a “missing link” that served as a connection between the various systems of the body. A basic understanding of the fascial system helps illustrate how this often overlooked tissue serves as that “missing link”.



Fascia is a single piece of connective tissue within the body comprised of both elastic (stretchy) and collagenous (tough, fibrous) fibers. Much like our skin has no beginning or ending, the fascia weaves its way through the body creating a structure resembling a spider’s web or sweater. This web of fascia houses every part of the body – muscles, bones, nerves, blood vessels and the internal organs; including the brain and spinal cord. Every part and system of the body, down to the cellular level, is connected through this complex tapestry of tissue. More information regarding the make-up and function of the fascial system can be found by reading our previous articles, including the one entitled “Fascia”.

When trauma occurs, the fascia loses its flexibility and reorganizes itself to support the new pressures placed upon it. Whether it be a fall, motor vehicle accident, surgery, loss of strength, overuse injuries or even habitual poor posture, these traumas have a cumulative effect; causing the fascia to become tight and chronically inflamed, resulting in pain and loss of function. Additionally, due to its singular nature, restrictions within the fascia can begin to affect the entire body. While these explanations have often been theorized and anecdotal, landmark research by French surgeon Dr. J.C. Guimberteau, including his book and video entitled “Strolling Under the Skin” lends support to these claims.

Research into the fascial system and the subsequent development of the John F. Barnes Myofascial Release Approach over the past 40 years creates a therapeutic model to address this often-times overlooked component to functional limitation, injury and pain. Myofascial Release, or MFR, utilizes gentle pressure over time into restrictions within the fascial system. This essential time element is one of the most important elements that separates MFR from all other manual modalities and allows the long-lasting structural and physiological changes that have escaped traditional therapies.

Massage (including deep tissue), joint mobilization/manipulation, therapeutic exercise, heat, ultrasound, electrical stimulation and all other tools are effective, but only in addressing the elastic (stretchy) component of fascia. This is analogous to stretching a rubber band; it will snap back given time. Through the utilization of pressure into the restrictions for extended periods of time, MFR allows us to address the collagenous (fibrous) component of fascia; thereby affecting permanent change within the system. Using our previous example, this would change the size of the rubber band, thereby reducing the need to add additional stretch to the system to mimic an increase in room.

Through a thorough evaluation, the therapists at Inner Circle Rehabilitation can assess areas of fascial restriction throughout the body. This is achieved through a complete patient history, body-wide postural assessment, hands-on assessment of the tone and texture of the tissue, range of motion, muscle testing and the subjective complaints of pain and/or loss of function. At this point, the therapists can begin to utilize the myriad MFR techniques to address these areas of restriction.

Utilizing the gentle pressure described above, these areas can release and the tissues return to their natural, fluid state. With the excessive pressure in the system released, the body's own self-correcting mechanism can begin to allow the chronic inflammation to finally resolve. This allows for a healthier pattern of movement and function to emerge. At this point, therapeutic exercise and traditional modalities become much more effective and assist in reinforcing this healthier state; so as not to allow the body to return to the familiar, yet dysfunctional, patterns.

Patients often wonder what to expect with MFR. While there are no “cookie-cutter” answers; as we are unique, our healing will be unique; there are some commonalities. The therapist will utilize varying techniques and pressures to sink into the fascia and engage the restriction. They will hold this pressure until the tissue begins to release and, following the tissue three-dimensionally, engage the next layer of restriction.

During this time, the patient can experience pain sensations – tenderness, tingling, burning and/or sharpness, to name a few. While these sensations may hurt, they will never injure you. As discussed previously, the tissue is stuck in a state of chronic inflammation. Think of your forearm; you could slap it, blow on it, run it under warm water – no tenderness or pain would be produced. However, if your forearm was sunburned (inflamed), you would not want someone to look at it wrong for fear of it hurting! The structures placed under pressure by restrictions within the fascia are stuck in a state of being “sunburned” or inflamed. Until the pressure is released, the body is unable to resolve the inflammatory response. Additionally, due to the singular nature of the fascial system, these sensations are not relegated to the area being treated. During treatment, sensations may arise in other areas of the body; it is important to keep the therapist informed as this is the body uncovering connections to deeper layers of restriction.

Finally, the patient may experience increased soreness after treatment; this is incredibly valuable. The body is finally able to process and purge the toxins that have built up in the tissue due to chronic inflammation and muscle spasm. A good metaphor is to think of cleaning your house. The continual cycle of compensation and restriction in the fascia is akin to sweeping dust under a rug; at some point the rug cannot accept anymore. When we utilize MFR, our goal is to sweep the dust out of the house. In order to do that, we must “dirty up the house” a bit. This is the soreness and discomfort that can manifest during and after treatment.

With the utilization of Myofascial Release into our individualized treatment programs, the potential for authentic healing becomes a reality. The causes for pain and loss of function are brought to the forefront and treated, relieving the symptomatic complaints that make up the patients diagnosis. We finally have a treatment model that treats the patient as a whole being, allowing for a return to an active and pain-free lifestyle. We welcome you to inquire about how Inner Circle's individualized programs can assist you in reaching your full potential.

Professionally Yours,

David Noonan, PTA

*For an appointment please call (215) 860-3623*

*“The Natural Force Within Each of Us  
is the Greatest Healer of Disease” – Hippocrates*