

TFH, FITNESS, AND ATHLETES

by Margaret J. Sheehan

Fitness is fast becoming a way of life in our world. Almost everyone has at least attempted some type of sport or activity to improve their well-being. Unfortunately many abandon exercise programs because of pain or fatigue that results from muscle imbalances. Touch for Health can be an invaluable tool in overcoming those obstacles and make getting in shape an exciting process of self discovery. Even for those who are fit and competing in strenuous events, TFH can give a physical and psychological edge in preparing for competition, preventing debilitating injuries and reducing recovery time. As TFH instructors, I think it's extremely important for us to look at the possibilities of TFH becoming an active partner with the fitness movement to attain our goal of helping people to improve their physical and mental well-being.

Moving from a therapeutic model to educating and empowering people can be quite a challenge, but is essential in making TFH techniques a part of daily life. I first discovered the practical applications while teaching exercise. When students couldn't do a particular movement I showed them what points to work to improve muscle response. The results were impressive.

I then began teaching my massage clients what techniques they could use; the results were mixed. Some "forgot" what I had taught; others used the techniques daily. Those who responded best were those who used the techniques in athletic activity. One in particular, a professional triathlete, used TFH and Edu-K to help him to 6th place at the Iron-Man in Hawaii.

The most important dynamic in working with each individual is to listen to their concerns. To pay close attention to what feels tired, what feels

tight and tell them what they can do about it. What nutritional considerations may be involved, what points they can work to improve function, in short Educate! Emphasize that the muscle tests indicate quality of response, not strength or weakness. This encourages those who aren't very fit, and reassures those who are. For instance you'll lose credibility by telling a body-builder he has a weak pectoralis muscle, and you'll discourage the beginning walker by telling them they have weak quadriceps. Use language like "this muscle doesn't seem to be 100%; what do you think?" "That seemed a bit shaky to me, do you want to tune that up?"

It may seem trivial, but our language is extremely powerful in conveying our message, and working from an educational model can expand the possibilities of our reaching a large audience of well motivated people.

People beginning a fitness program or athletes in training have the luxury of learning new skills and incorporating them. This is the best time to re-educate the body with reactive muscle work, to take a look at what nutritional adjustments may be indicated, and to teach which neurolymphatic points correspond to which muscles. I suggest introducing new information a little at a time, so that it is a natural progression not an overwhelming burden. Cross-crawls for warm ups and cool downs, checking gaits, eyes and ears are all valuable in addition to the basic balancing techniques.

For competitive athletes pre-event work should be brief and reassuring. Many athletes find it very helpful to hold their frontal eminences while visualizing doing their best. Using the corrections for visual and auricular inhibition also seem

helpful for the centering and focusing effects. This is not always a good time to begin work with someone new. Unless you come highly recommended, most athletes will not risk doing something entirely new immediately before an event. Post-event balancing is very rewarding. It is a real pleasure to see someone who is exhausted and cramping relax and brighten with balancing. When working with athletes immediately after an event I am very patient and calming. I slowly go through the range of motion before testing. If there is any difficulty I correct until the muscle can be comfortably tested. Many of the athletes I've worked with for the first time after an event comment that they feel better than they had before the race!

These are general guidelines of what I've found helpful in my work, and I'm constantly changing the specifics of what I do to suit the situation. The majority of my work has been with triathletes, but the same basic ideas have worked well for swim-

mers, cyclers, runners and walkers. I've had wonderful results for myself in my studies of martial arts. I'm currently exploring the possibilities of doing research with teams.

The marketing potential for TFH with athletics is endless. I found it very productive to do demonstrations at local spas and gyms. Massage teams offering support at events have been very successful at developing positive public attitude towards massage. Why not do the same with TFH? I organized TFH basic students and teachers in my area to balance participants before and after a local triathlon and we had a good response. We not only got the attention of the participants, but their families and friends as well.

I would like to support anyone interested in developing these ideas further. If you've had experiences in this area I welcome your input. If you have any questions I'd be glad to answer them. ■

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