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## THE BODY-CARE FIELD

is abuzz with talk of a fundamental element in our anatomy. It's called the fascia – an almost invisible substance beneath the skin that attaches, stabilises, encloses and separates internal organs and muscles. You may not see it or even know it's there, but you'd be surprised by how much this gooey layer contributes to our body's optimal performance.

Our lifestyles put a lot of strain on our bodies, and this can cause pain in the regions that are most affected, whether it is in our muscles, joints, tendons or bones. So what do we do? We treat the pain or issue with medication, surgery and other therapies that target the problem area. And sometimes, this can even lead to further complications or the pain returning at a later stage.

Recent studies are saying that there is a much simpler, risk-free and holistic way to heal and strengthen your body... And the answer lies in your fascia.

### A Connected System

Our muscles, nerves, skeleton, ligaments and tendons have always been the heroes when it comes to our bodies moving, and until recently, the fascia was just seen as a layer of protective tissue, woven in-between and all around these major parts, with no significant function.

But now studies have begun to credit it as the glue that holds everything together when we move, reducing friction, acting as a shock absorber against gravity and momentum, connecting all our muscles, tendons and bones, and allowing for the smooth, effortless flow of energy between all of them.

We can keep an upright posture thanks to the fascia and how it contributes to our body's 'tensegrity'. This term, coined by American architect and systems theorist Buckminster Fuller, is used to describe our body's structure. The integrity of our body's structure relies on a network of

# CONNECTION

incredible

*Lying under your skin are bands of connective tissue that work very hard to keep everything functioning properly. We doubt you've thought much about this, but you can keep your fasciae healthy*

By LAUREN ENDRODY



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### TIGHT, TIGHT, TIGHT

*How do you know if you have tight fasciae? You may feel some or all of these symptoms:*

- If you experience any chronic stiffness or pain, for example in your back
- If any parts of your body feel weak
- If you have a bad posture
- If you have tight joints
- If you've had any injuries or surgeries that resulted in the forming of scar tissue
- If you have chronic inflammation in your organs, such as with endometriosis or gastrointestinal problems
- If you suffer from chronic inflammation in your bones that could have affected the nerves and muscles
- If you have bad blood circulation
- Even cellulite and wrinkles are caused by a degenerating fascia.

constant tension between our skeleton and our muscles – and the elasticity of our fasciae between them. That's what makes humans so bendy, adaptable and resilient. As one of the pioneers of fascial movement therapy Thomas Myers says: 'Put strain into a tensegrity structure and the deformation will get distributed all over the structure.' This is opposite to the 'compressionegritty' of man-made structures, in which the integrity of a building relies on constant compression from top to bottom.

When placed under pressure, a compressionegritty structure will break at the point where the most pressure is applied, whereas a tensegrity structure will absorb the pressure and break at its weakest point. A lot of the time, this is what causes misaligned posture, injuries, movement dysfunctions and pain – and this is what traditional treatments target.

But therapies focused on the fascia target the source of the pressure and work on bringing back elasticity to the body as a whole, since everything is connected as one unified system.

## Information Highway

Not only does the fascia facilitate movement through its elasticity, but it is made up of collagen and cells that are receiving and transmitting information between our major organs and internal structures when we move. 'Fascia has been shown to contain sensory organs,' says integrative movement specialist Dr Evan Osar, 'suggesting that it is important in detecting and relaying information back to the central nervous system about body position and movement. Therefore it has the ability to respond to different regions of tension and muscular pull by either dampening or redirecting this stress along the different fascial lines, reducing the potential for overloading any single region of the body.' This, again, is done to maintain the body's tensegrity.

This thin sheath of fibrous tissue has undoubtedly proven itself to be an active part of the body that can change, adapt and be influenced by external forces. But it doesn't always react in a positive way. When it senses stress in a specific area, it can produce more fibres that will cluster around the area of stress, forming a thick layer that inhibits the usual flow of energy. 'Fascia responds poorly to the aggressive force and repetition found in some exercise methods,' says fascia movement therapist Anna Rahe. 'When strenuously overworked, fascia becomes too adrenal and resists and congests.' At the same time, when it doesn't receive enough movement or isn't stretched or massaged out enough, it could become tight and unresponsive.

## Fascia Fixes

There are many simple ways to get your fascia into tip-top shape and keeping it like that. Stretching is probably the most effective way to do this, because it boosts your fascia's elasticity, breaks down those extra layers of tissue and improves the mucosity. Try to do different types of elongating stretches every day – yoga is great for this.

Stress and emotional tension can cause a build-up of tissue too and result in your fascia becoming rigid. Work on letting go of stress and finding time to relax.

Fascia can become dry and brittle over time if you don't keep hydrated, so drink plenty of water. Heat also helps fascia to become supple, so visit the sauna or soak

in a hot bath. Even a bit of cardio can help boost that body heat and get your fascia pumping.

Foam-rolling is also a great way to knead out a stubborn fascia, and if you don't have a foam roller, you can simply use a tennis ball instead.

Finally, the fascia boom gave rise to therapies that focus on treating, healing and strengthening fasciae specifically, like Thomas Myers' Anatomy Trains, Anna Rahe's Grace Somatomorphic Technique, MAP (Myofascial Activated Posture) Movement and some massage therapies, such as Myofascial Release Therapy. If you want to gain a deeper understanding of your fascia, you should look into these.

At the end of the day, if you manage to keep your fascia in a healthy condition,

you will see your posture improve, your muscles will become stronger and more flexible, your coordination and balance will improve, any inflammation in your bones, muscles or joints will subside (and so will the pain), the movement in your joints will improve thanks to the increased production of synovial fluid, the chances of getting injuries during any physical exertion will decrease, the toxic levels of cortisol and adrenaline in your body will reduce, your body's alignment and symmetry will improve, your blood circulation will improve, and finally, any emotional or gravitational pulls or tension in your tissue can be streamlined and your collagen and elastin enhanced. Bye-bye, cellulite, stretch marks, sagging skin and wrinkles! **FL**



### LOCAL FASCIA MOVEMENT THERAPIES

#### GAUTENG

##### MAP Movement

[mapmovement.co.za](http://mapmovement.co.za)

##### Inside Out Pilates Studio

[midstreampilates.co.za](http://midstreampilates.co.za)

#### WESTERN CAPE

##### Fascia Release Therapy

[transformyourlife.capetown](http://transformyourlife.capetown)

##### Fascia Release Massage Therapy

[jtmassagetherapy.co.za](http://jtmassagetherapy.co.za)

##### Myofascial Release Therapy

[drstuartross.co.za](http://drstuartross.co.za)

