



## Marathon & Massage

One of the greatest misconceptions about massage is the idea that massage therapists merely “rub muscles”. What many people don’t realize is that massage can and does have a significant impact on almost every single major system in the body.

### The different types of sports massage

Athletes participating in any type of sport, especially marathon runners, will benefit greatly from regular massage. The type of benefit depends on the timing of the massage - pre-event, post event, and inter-event. Pre-event massages are designed to keep an athlete relaxed and healthy as he prepares for an event. Inter-event massages are great for active athletes who regularly jump from one event to another with only a few days in between. Post-event massages help to flush out the excess waste produced in the body during an event which helps to alleviate muscle soreness while reducing spasms.

### The physical effects of sports massage

Marathon participants will find that regular massages will help them keep their body in the best physical shape possible. Here are a few of the main benefits of a sports massage on the physical body for runners:

- Your lymphatic system depends on movement in order to function, unlike the circulatory system which relies on your heart in order to pump blood through the body. Because your muscles are tight and

contracted they can't get the blood flow they need.

The motions used during a massage will not only relax that tension but will then encourage the flow of both blood and lymphatic fluid, moving toxins out of your body and bringing fresh blood flow to your muscles so that they can repair themselves and recover.

- Regular massage helps to increase the tissue permeability of a muscle and will encourage microcirculation. In short, a deep massage will help to open the pores in your muscle tissues, allowing oxygen and nutrients to flow through the muscles once they arrive. Massage increases healthy blood flow by dilating the blood vessels which allows the muscles to receive more healthy blood flow as well.

- Runners preparing for a marathon tend to train really hard. While you think you’re doing yourself a favor you may actually be hindering your progress. The harder you train, the harder your muscles become and, as such, they lose some of their elasticity and flexibility. Frequent massage will help to keep those muscle tissues stretched and will ensure they’re receiving the right nutritious blood flow.

- If you are suffering from or have had an injury in the past you may have scar tissue. Regular massage will help to break down some of the scar tissue that may be affecting the performance of your muscles, ligaments, and tendons. Massage won’t make the scar tissue disappear but it will help to make it more flexible so that you can continue training with less limitation.

## The psychological benefits of sports massage

Massage is not without psychological benefits, many of which are particularly important for runners training for marathons. Here are a few of the main psychological benefits:

- Massage, as noted earlier, has a great impact on almost every system of the body - including the endocrine system. Massage promotes the release of endorphins which will act as natural painkillers while reducing some of the pain associated with your heavy training schedule.
- Massage affects the nervous system by stimulating the mechanoreceptors in your body. Mechanoreceptors are responsible for the muscle's ability to sense pressure and touch, to know when it has lengthened or contracted, and for keeping the muscles warm. Stimulated mechanoreceptors contribute to muscle relaxation.
- The release of endorphins caused by massage will also aid you in keeping a positive mental mindset as you continue training for your marathon. As your body relaxes you'll find that the anxiety you feel regarding your upcoming event is dissipating and, if you have brisk pre-event massage you may even feel invigorated.

## How much is too much?

There's really no straight great answer to this question as every athlete is different. Regular weekly massages will definitely help to keep your body in shape as you prepare for your event. You should not, however, have a sports massage before a heavy workout. Your muscles, after being brought to this relaxed state, will not be prepared for a high-impact workout and forcing them may lead you to injury.

For best results you should not have a massage more than 2-3 days before your big event. Have your massage therapist work with you a few days before hand so that your body has time to recover and limit your workouts in the last few days so that you don't get any last minute strains or injuries. After your marathon you may opt for a very brief massage to work out any immediate tension but for best results you should wait until about 48 hours after the event so that your therapist isn't working on acute injuries.

Take a cool shower immediately after the event to minimize microtears and bleeding in your muscles. Doing so will minimise the pain, you feel the next day whereas a hot shower may contribute to the pain. Your post-event massage will take care of the rest!



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