

Working with Fascia

- Fascia is connective tissue
- It forms the pods (fascicles) that contain musculature like a honeycombs or segments of fruit
- Fascia runs through entire body – it's everywhere!
- Connects muscle to bone (tendons are part of the fascial system), and bone to bone (ligaments are part of the fascial system), slings organ structures, cushions your vertebrae (discs are part of the fascial system), wraps your bones
- Remove every part of you that is not fascia, you have a perfect 3D model of you. Not just in your posture or facial features, but also the position of your liver, and the patterns of bone breaks, and use, and how your colon wraps.
- Fascia's everywhere-ness is one reason why overlooked. In dissection it was scraped away.
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As yoga therapists we can work with fascia this these ways (and more). We can work with fascia as a:

1. Tensional fluid system

Fascia behaves as a tensile fluid system; these two features seem contradictory. It helps to remember they are within LIVING conscious tissue! Fascia has properties of a sponge and of webbing or netting. It is both strong, supple, somewhat movable and can condense and expand. Juicy fascia is happy fascia. Like when a sponge dries out, this aspect of fascia can allow it to become more brittle, hard and dense. However, when a sponge is fluid filled it becomes more springy and resilient. You can compress it and it bounces back. You can wring it and it will recover and won't tear or break.

Our mobility, integrity, and resilience are determined in large part by how well hydrated our fascia is. In fact, what we call "stretching a muscle" is actually the fibers of the connective tissue (collagen) gliding along one another on the mucous-y proteins called glycosaminoglycans (GAGs for short). GAGs, depending on their chemistry, can glue layers together when water is absent, or allow them to skate and slide on one another when hydrated. Staying hydrated via drinking continues to be important, but if you have dehydrated congested fascia it's like having kinks in your "hoses" (microvacuoles). The water you drink won't be able to reach the dehydrated tissue until you move it around and loosen it up! (some like yoga?) To be able to get the fluid to all of your important nooks and crannies you need to first get better irrigated (via the microvacuoles.) And to do that, you've got to get some flow going through your bodies soft tissue to untangle those globs and sticky dense areas.

Ways to do this are:

- Seeing a body worker who specializes in myofascial work (Rolfing, Structural Integration)
- Work on this at home with self-care tools like rollers, balls, scrapers, cups, etc.
- Move in multiple directions in fuller and fuller ranges of motion within capacity & w/o strain.
- Heat, water, hot water (☺) and movement and gentle stretching
- Heat, movement, and limited time propped positions
- Appliance-free yard and garden work, natural movement like barefoot hiking, swimming, playing

2. Multidimensional matrix of support

Multidimensional movement with differing movement qualities and rhythms hydrate the tissues as well. This means variation not just of spatial aspects of the movements themselves, but also variation of tempo and quality. Constantly varying movement. Period! Not only does moving constantly in the same ways and in the same planes put you at further risk for joint erosion (osteoarthritis), but you also continuously dehydrate the fascia in a same particular pattern. This is a set up for brittle tissue injuries.

Myers: “Rest is how the tissues rehydrate. When you do heavy exercise you are driving the water out of the tissue in the same way that if you step on a wet beach you push the water out of the sand, and when you pick up your foot the water seeps back into that sand. You’re doing the same thing with tissues, when you’re really working out you are driving the water out of the tissue while you are working...The rhythm [of your fitness regimen] should include some rest... When you take the strain off of the tissues, like a sponge they will suck up that water and be ready for more exercise.”

3. Total body system of connection

Learning anatomy gives us the impression each tissue is its own singular island universe, and that is not the way it really is. Even the language of origin and insertion gives the image of a muscle being taped or stapled to be “attached” at its origin and insertion points. A more true description would be that say the gastrocnemius becomes the Achilles tendon by weaving more densely until muscle becomes tendon, and that then becomes the calcaneus bone by weaving more densely until tendon becomes bone. There is a continuousness between all the tissues. So unlike what western medicine may need to make a diagnosis, per se, this idea of connection gives us a handier understanding of how you just plain can’t have something happen to one part of your body and not have it affect every other part! Injury is often a domino effect – an imbalance begins a cascade of imbalances that bring injury upon injury.

Thomas: “First, your neck gets injured in a minor whiplash in that..car accident. that you had when you were sixteen years old. ...You ignore it and it gets better. But once you enter college, suddenly you have this nagging shoulder pain with all the extra typing and sitting you’re doing. As the years go by you start to think of yourself as the “tight-shouldered” person, and sometimes you have a pinching pain when you lift your arm. More years go by and ...you also suffer from occasional low back spasms and have developed plantar fasciitis,”

The best way to avoid the domino effect is to keep your fascia healthy through all the ways listed above so that nothing gets jumbled up in the knit of your fascial “sweater”.

4. Resilient support system

your tissue retains or regains its natural spring, the rebound effect of the healthy fascia allows us to use less muscle power and therefore fatigue less rapidly. Light impact and engaging movements such as jogging, playing a sport, dancing support this resilience in the fascia tissues.

5. “Huge” sensory organ ☺

Fascia is one of our richest sensory organs with six to ten times more sensory nerve receptors than the muscles. It is possible fascia may be equal or superior to the retina, which has so far been considered the richest human sensory organ. This makes fascia a system of proprioception - of knowing where your body is in space as this contributes to overall coordination and sequencing. As above, the way to wake up the full potential of proprioception is to engage in constantly varied movements.

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