

Holding back

Local myofascial release (MFR) therapist,
Catherine Franks, talks about Fascia

FASCIA; YOU MAY well have heard your yoga/pilates/gym instructor talk about opening and releasing it. But what exactly is it?

This amazing and mysterious 'part' of our body is better known as connective tissue and it plays a vital role in keeping us healthy and mobile.

Fascia is quite literally everywhere inside us and, far from being just a packing material, research now confirms that it is involved in many, many aspects of our health. A watery, multi-dimensional network that connects and holds the structures of your body in place, as well as many other functions, it allows full and fluid movement.

Our fascia has the texture of liquid gel, being 80% water, that flows through a constantly changing matrix of protein fibres. These - collagen and elastin - have stabilising and elastic properties. More specifically, myo-fascia (myo meaning muscle) forms the superficial and deep layers of scaffolding that connect and surround the microscopic fibres of our muscles. It holds us together, maintains posture and allows us to move. It forms the tendons that attach muscles to your skeleton, and ligaments that connect it together, playing a major role in joint stability and general movement.

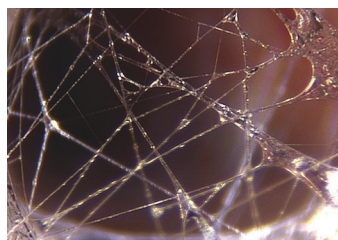
This fascial network is full of highly sensitive nerve receptors which communicate constantly about what's going on both inside and out. This then triggers changes to the structure and shape of the fascia itself in a never-ending loop of feedback and adjustment.

Healthy, bouncy, well-hydrated fascia is superb at allowing us to move freely, ably demonstrated by children and any dancer or gymnast. As we get older we accumulate injuries, scars and trauma and put ourselves through daily, often relentless stress.

The 'threat' we perceive each time starts a chain of events that sets up an inflammatory response, readying us to fly, fight or freeze so that we are more likely to survive. The resulting injury triggers a pain message. This all happens so fast we usually hardly notice. It is

completely normal, and we are designed to switch off again when the threat has gone. Inflammation is switched off and normal service resumes. Any residual stress hormones get spread out around the network of fascia to form tiny sticky restrictions. You'll see animals shake and stretch as this happens.

But we're sophisticated,



Living fascia under the microscope



Tight fascia can feel heavy, restricted and painful



Catherine Franks

'Not surprisingly, with so many touch-sensitive nerve receptors - over 250 million is the latest estimate - fascia responds well to touch therapies.'

modern humans who live lives that trigger this response hundreds of times a day, with many of us being 'switched on' all of the time. But we lead increasingly sedentary lifestyles and have been taught to sit still. So we don't shake it off. A cycle of threat, react, inflame, pain, is then established. Subtle messages, that become louder as we ignore them, lead to a build up of those sticky restrictions in the fascia making us feel heavy and weighed down, putting more pressure on the nerve receptors. Unchecked, we can develop chronic pain and other health issues.

Not surprisingly, with so many touch-sensitive nerve receptors - over 250 million is the latest estimate - fascia responds well to touch therapies. Myofascial release (or MFR) uses gentle, sustained pressure with just the right amount of tension so fascia is able to relax, allowing fluid back into dehydrated, locked-down areas so that the fibres can slide and glide again. The heavy, stuck feeling goes and we start to move more freely again. It's one way of reversing the cycle and it can feel wonderful.

For those of us who can't afford hands-on treatment to deal with a lifetime of stress and injury, simple tricks, little and often, help regulate the stress response: Sit less. Move more - just a little, but all the time. Breathe properly. Drink water.

'Don't fidget' really is the worst advice ever!

www.thebodytherapist.co.uk
07748 637555