

Sports Massage by Lynda Keane at the London Marathon 2008

The Flora London marathon is an annual event and the largest of its kind in the world. With some 33,000 people taking part from all walks of life and all abilities, from the worlds elite, to the man on the street.

Pre-event massage

The aims of pre-event massage are to optimise capabilities for physical performance, to warm the muscles and increase circulation. The circulatory effect of massage can reduce muscle soreness and therefore aid conditions that could cause muscle soreness or injury. After heavy training waste material, microtrauma and slight swelling are common occurrences within the muscles. Muscle tissue will be nutritionally depleted and some may be in need of repair. Massage improves the effectiveness of rest between training sessions and post event.

Post event massage

Post event massage increases the supply of oxygen rich blood to muscles and the surrounding tissue, aiding removal of waste products and lactic acid. Gentle massage also helps relax spasmed muscles. As many athletes forget or are too exhausted to warm down post marathon, a massage can be an adequate substitute. Many athletes feel that when delayed onset of muscle soreness does occur stretching is very beneficial in assisting with relaxation and muscle lengthening. Self stretching and ice therapy can also be beneficial, post event, to those athletes with bruising and also to prevent swelling. At both pre and post marathon events assisted stretches and PNF (proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation) can also assist with preparation or recovery by rebalancing muscles groups, however precautions should be taken when performing PNF stretches as there can be a possible increase in the risk of damage to soft tissues on the specific targeted muscle.

My experiences at the Marathon

I enjoyed the pre event massage more than the post event massage for ease of performance, though they were two incomparable events. Excel was relaxed, bright, and there was a feeling of anticipation in the air. The athletes were enjoying there experiences and sharing training stories on their road to the day. Massage was mainly light effleurage, rolling and kneading for relaxation and the easing of last minute aches. Most athletes wanted their legs massaged, with a few opting for lower back relief as well. With spinal compression being an issue for road runners I was surprised that more athletes did not choose this option. The only problem I was presented with was an athlete who was getting pain in her first metatarsal joint. It was suggested she ice the area that evening and the following day but not to change her running shoes as this would probably affect the way she runs. It was also suggested that she went and had a foot analysis on one of the stands to check her running gait and see if it showed any problems.

The day of the event was cool and wet. Athletes came in dehydrated and shivering. Muscles were red and burning and the athletes felt cold and clammy to the touch. The room we used was wall to wall with beds and athletes came in thick and fast. Massage was used to redistribute oxygenated blood to various muscles and lengthen any shortened muscle fibres. Athletes were exhausted yet euphoric at their achievement and very grateful to receive any treatment that relieved the tension within the muscles. Though I personally did not have any challenging situations I was aware that some athletes had gone into shock. Seeing people push their bodies to such extremes is always a humbling experience.

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Despite there being significant documented evidence on the benefits of treatment from a performance specialist for an event such as the marathon, many people did not have the time or financial resources to consult a therapist or running coach to assist in training for the marathon, however following the treatments and advice on pre and post event care they received at the event, many were instantly convinced of the long term health and training benefits of working with a therapist next time they prepare for such an event.