

USING PERIODIZATION TO STRUCTURE MASSAGE TREATMENT PLANS FOR RUNNERS

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MASSAGE TREATMENT PLANS FOR RUNNERS**

You are just coming off a year of milestones, injuries, a new sport, or all three. You are now taking some time off to recover but wondering how you will feel when you get back on the roads. Will the legs feel fresh? Will that injury feel better? If not, either could derail the new season.

Top-level athletes have been benefiting from massage for many years. This is the perfect time to add massage to your training plan. Using massage in a training plan does not just involve sports massage. In addition to sports massage, which aids recovery, preparation, and injury prevention, there is also myofascial massage and orthopedic massage. Myofascial massage is used to correct structural imbalances and break up adhesions. Orthopedic massage is used to treat soft tissue injuries such as sprains and strains. Add to these deep tissue massage to relieve tension in the muscles that allow you to run more relaxed.

Just as the training year is broken down into periods, your massage treatment plan can be structured to focus on issues that are training period specific. I have scheduled below a high rate of massages, but they can be reduced depending on your constraints. Recovery from workouts will be attended to all year, but how you can treat stresses from more intense training will be period specific.

During periods of intense workouts the massages should take place on recovery days for maximum benefit. Massages decrease tension in the muscles that will be needed for the workouts. There are three prime times to schedule massages: the day of a recovery run before the run, after the recovery run, or after the workout. If it is after the recovery massage that takes place the day before a workout, you will want to consider a short reset workout after the massage. This can be a few short sprints or plyometric exercises at workout intensity.

Below is a breakdown of a training season into specific periods. Depending on your goals and level of training some of these periods may not be used.

REST PERIOD (2-4 Weeks)

During the Rest Period, the massage therapist will be focusing on the runner's body awareness, fully recovering from the last season, correcting structural imbalances, and repairing injuries. This should all start with an assessment to determine the treatment plan for the runner.

Massage sessions will be frequent during this period and depend on needs. Frequency will be as often as twice a week with the runner integrating into their workouts stretching, strengthening injuries, foam rolling, and warm baths.

BASE PERIOD (16-24 Weeks)

During the Base Period, the massage therapist will be focusing on how the runner is adapting to more time on the roads. Adjustments will be made to the treatment plan if necessary. Frequency can be as little as two times per month with the runner integrating in stretching, strengthening, foam rolling, and ice baths.

PRE-COMPETITIVE PERIOD (10 Weeks)

During the Pre-Competitive Period, the massage therapist will be focusing on the runner's recovery and injury prevention due to more specific training such as hills, intervals, threshold runs, and racing. The massage therapist will also be attentive to acute injuries. Frequency should be once per week. Massage sessions will be most effective on the recovery day immediately following an intense day, plus any orthopedic massage sessions* along with integrating in stretching, foam rolling, and ice baths.

If you prefer following a Pre-Competitive training program throughout the year, consider integrating in a Rest Period and a Transition Period during the months racing opportunities are at a minimum in your area. These usually take place in January and August.

PEAKING/COMPETITIVE PERIOD (8-12 Weeks)

During the Peaking/Competitive Period, the massage therapist will be focusing on the runner's recovery and preparation for high intensity training and racing**. Due to the high intensity, massage is recommended twice per week between the high intensity training sessions to enhance the recovery, along with integrating in stretching, foam rolling, and ice baths to the workouts. Taper the massage along with the training for the peak race to keep the springs loaded. During the taper the massage is going to be more important to keep the body and mind calm.

TRANSITION PERIOD (2-4 Weeks)

During the Transition Period, a period of recovery runs and low intensity workouts, which occurs if you are planning multiple peak seasons, the massage therapist will focus on a full recovery from the runner's season, including lingering injuries. Massages are recommended once per week plus any orthopedic massage sessions along with integrating stretching, foam rolling, and ice.

Following this massage treatment plan, the runner will have a season without unplanned breaks, go into future seasons being more prepared for the workload, and more capable to adapt to changes in training. Training volume can increase and performance enhanced by integrating a massage plan into your training.

** 1/2-hour sessions or integrated into other massage sessions.*

*** Make use of sports massage at events.*

Tom Church is a licensed massage therapist working out of Brookline's Washington Square, Newtonville, and Harvard University. He has been keeping people physically active and pain free since 2001.