

Massage + Fitness = Success

by Vincent Cambrea

Integrate Personal Training into Your Practice

Personal trainer Jason Atkins-Tuffs follows his client, Maria*, into the gym. He notices the waistband of her shorts is riding higher on one side, and she's limping nearly imperceptibly. He catches up with the focused weightlifter at the weight rack, but before she can put her water bottle down,

Atkins-Tuffs says to her, "Something's not quite right. Let's take a look."

He steers Maria to a massage table in the corner of the room, where he conducts a series of rapid assessments and determines her pelvis is in left-side anterior rotation, a small imbalance that would have become significant under the barbells she was about to lift. Within a few minutes on the table, she's in balance. They return to the weight rack, where Atkins-Tuffs leads Maria through a workout fit for the champion lifter she is. She lifts without pain, and without grinding a small imbalance into a large injury. She experiences the fun of lifting and the satisfaction of success, injury-free. This is working out as it should be. Clearly, Atkins-Tuffs is no ordinary trainer.

In fact, Atkins-Tuffs is a licensed massage therapist in Gainesville, Florida, with certification in personal training and extensive education in sports and human performance. As a massage therapist-trainer, he's at the forefront of a revolutionary shift in the world of fitness—one that has changed his life and could change yours.

Professionals with interdisciplinary skills—licenses in massage therapy and certifications from nationally accredited personal training organizations—are transforming both industries by taking bodywork to its maximum potential. Therapists enter personal training with substantial education in anatomy, physiology and kinesiology. Equally valuable are their abilities to put their hands on people and work sensitively with the human body. This is a perfect foundation for designing workouts and putting them into action to meet a client's goals.

with training in the gym. This tandem approach is an integration of programs.

Howard says an easy way to understand the integration is to think about his clients with headaches: They have headaches because of forward-head posture and kyphosis, which strain neck-and-jaw muscles. Massage releases the strain. Exercise strengthens the muscles that counteract forward posture.

When working out, Howard can see the dysfunction as the client moves, get him on the table, make a swift correction, and get him back onto the floor. It's more difficult to spot dysfunction when a client is simply on a table. Howard has to see a client in the environment of movement, where assessment and correction can

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When an MT becomes a trainer

"What if you, as a massage therapist, could put extra billable hours into each day without getting hurt, and add extra years to your career without getting burned out? Would that be valuable to you?" asks David Howard, a massage therapist and personal trainer from Savannah, Georgia. He's talking, of course, about adding personal training to a massage therapist's career.

Howard started out as a Pilates instructor and massage therapist, specializing in sports. Early in his practice, his massage clients felt good for a day or two, but were returning to him too often with the same issues. He wanted to learn how to better address clients' underlying problems.

"I knew something was missing," he says. That something was the ability to help strengthen the client during workouts. Howard increased his education with a certification in sports massage and then became a certified personal trainer, adding a second key discipline to his practice.

Massage allows Howard to loosen and soften a client's muscles, preparing them to work. He follows that

be made. This is where massage therapy and fitness training work together for maximum results.

Perfect timing

The time is perfect for recession-proofing a massage therapy practice, because the fitness industry is booming.

According to annual surveys conducted by the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (www.ihrsa.com), memberships in health clubs and gyms in the U.S. increased from 41.3 million in 2005 to 50.2 million in 2012. There are approximately 58.5 million Americans actively utilizing fitness centers and systems.

IBISWorld, a leading publisher of business intelligence, reports of fitness, "During the five years to 2019, the industry will benefit from an increase in per-capita disposable income and government initiatives to fight obesity and improve health."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the number of jobs within the \$22 billion fitness industry is expected



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to increase by more than 23 percent over the next 10 years. It suggests occupations like fitness instructor and personal trainer are driving the success of the fitness industry.

Here is the good news for you: With one extra certification, a massage therapist is poised to step into those new jobs and revolutionize the exploding fitness industry.

A natural fit

Massage therapist and certified personal trainer Tait A. Yoder, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, understands the revolution in fitness. In fact, he's helping to lead it. As a young massage therapist, he worked in the University of North Carolina women's soccer program and swim team, and with college, national and Olympic athletes. He says he massaged to correct issues that could have been prevented with strength and conditioning.

Sensing that massage was not enough, he worked with coaches to suggest specific, corrective exercises based on his observations. It wasn't long before he certified as a personal trainer himself to get the job done.

Atkins-Tuffs had the same epiphany. "Clients would come in, wrecks. I would work on them. They got 100 percent better. They left and returned a week later. I worked on them. They got 100 percent better. They left and returned a week later. I wanted to ask what these people were doing between sessions, but I realized I was doing only one thing for them, massage. I needed more tools."

Eventually, Atkins-Tuffs' tools included a personal training certification and a degree from Florida

Gulf Coast University in Health Science: Human Performance. Nothing was ever the same.

Yoder's life also changed forever with a shift in thinking and the addition of a training certification.

One of Yoder's training clients is a competitive swimmer in his 40s. For 20 years, this athlete had pectoral pain and dysfunction that affected his performance. When he came to him, Yoder asked if any of the many specialists he'd seen had ever put hands on him. The client said, "Not one." Yoder was stunned. He worked with the athlete for eight sessions of soft-tissue work, eventually releasing the injury. It got better with every session. The client now understands the mechanics of his body and is able to identify and correct his patterns of compensation. He has dropped his time, in his 40s.

"My overall approach to the body has changed dramatically," Yoder says. "I now move a client back and forth from the table to the floor, tuning in and tuning them in."

The path to trainer

The path from massage therapist to massage therapist-trainer starts with the belief that adding strengthening and conditioning to sessions will help clients reach their goals. It helps if the therapist has some knowledge and appreciation for fitness. Passion is a huge bonus. The next step is to certify with a nationally accredited personal training certification program that offers hands-on education, such as the National Academy of Sports Medicine, or find a program designed for massage therapists transitioning into personal training.

Atkins-Tuffs warns to avoid any program that promises proficiency from studying exclusively online or from a book. You have to show up. Training is both art and science that requires hands-on work for a lifetime. As Atkins-Tuffs says, "You learn every day."

Launch your career

The benefits of working out with a personal trainer with a license in massage therapy are immediately evident to clients, as they get fit and healthy in the safest possible environment. The benefits to therapists are even greater. With more to offer clients, practices are revitalized.

"As a professional therapist-trainer, I'm positioned in the marketplace as highly competitive," says Yoder. "I don't rely on one revenue stream, that of a therapist or trainer. I have both."

As massage therapists train clients, the therapists also get into better shape, making their work in massage easier, safer and more effective. Stronger, leaner bodies are not so susceptible to wear and tear. There are more injury-free, billable hours in a day. A fit therapist who switches from the table to the gym floor every day can

withstand the physical demands of massage and work longer, effectively lengthening a career.

Massage therapist-trainers can command elite-level salaries in the marketplace. The integration of fitness training into a massage therapy practice will result in client benefits and, for the massage therapist, a more varied and lucrative career.

* Client's name has been changed.

Read "Fitness for Massage Therapists," by Yamuna Zake, at www.massagemag.com/fitnessMTs.

Vincent Cambrea is a faculty member at the Florida School of Massage, celebrating its 40th anniversary in Gainesville, Florida. He is also director of education for Cambrea Institute (www.cambreainstitute.com), and creator of Integrated Massage and Personal (IMAP) Training for massage therapists who certify with the National Academy of Sports Medicine as personal trainers. He wrote "Your Healthy Body: Nutrition and Exercise to Fuel Your Life," for the July 2013 issue of *MASSAGE Magazine*.

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