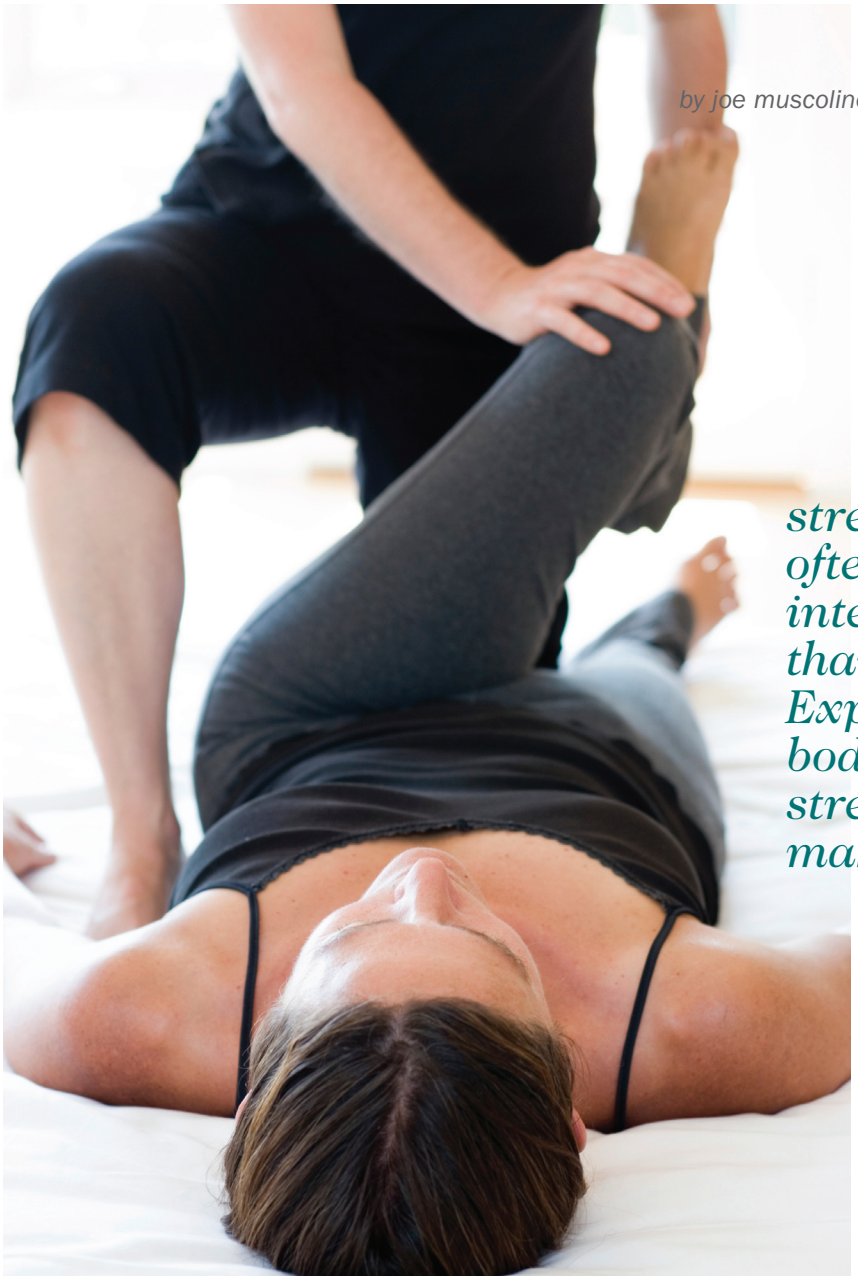


stretching a client is often just as physically intense, if not more so, than doing massage. Exploring proper body mechanics when stretching clients makes good sense.

body mechanics for stretching

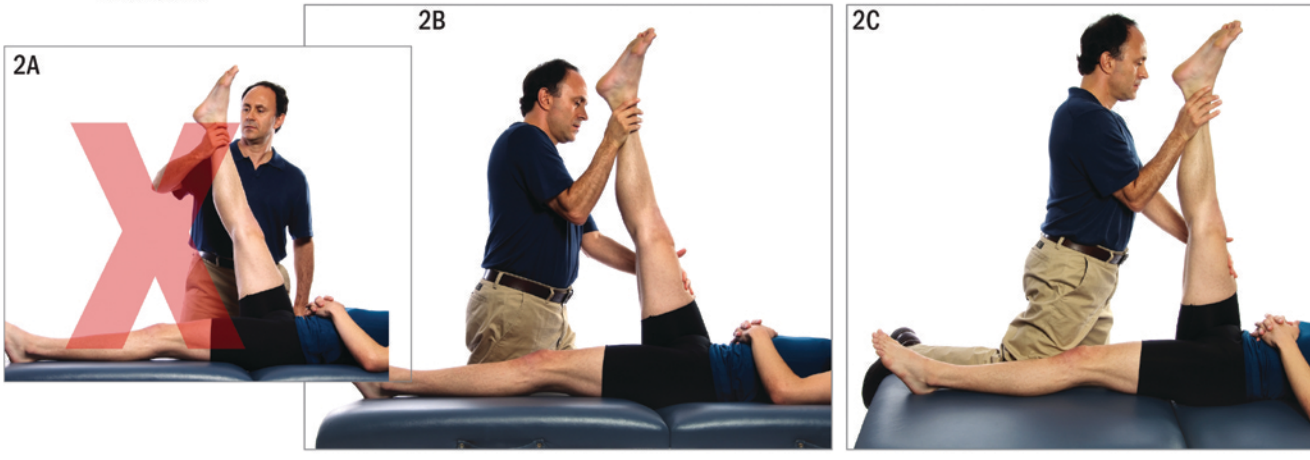
When performing massage, understanding how to employ good body mechanics is wise. Massage is physically intense and the use of proper mechanics allows the therapist to work more efficiently, and therefore expend less effort. However, when massage therapists are working to stretch their clients, the importance of good body mechanics is rarely addressed. This omission is unfortunate, as stretching a client is often just as physically intense, if not more so, than doing massage. For this reason, exploring proper body mechanics when stretching clients makes good sense.

From the Core

One tenet of body mechanics when doing massage therapy is to always try to work from the core. This principle also applies to stretching. For example, if we want to stretch our client's left lateral flexor muscles of the head and neck, we need to push his head and neck into right lateral flexion.

Using the core means placing our core behind the upper extremity that is pushing the client's head. Figure 1 demonstrates this stretch being performed with the client supine and the therapist seated. In Figure 1a, the therapist is seated at the head of the table. In this position, any force used to push on the client's head must to be generated by the therapist's shoulder musculature. Figure 1b shows the therapist seated at the left corner of the table. Sitting here, he can align his core behind his forearm by tucking the elbow inside the anterior superior iliac spine (ASIS). Leaning in with his core by rocking his pelvis forward transfers the force of the pelvis through the forearm and directly into the client to move

Stretching the client's neck into right lateral flexion. **Figure 1a** shows the therapist using the musculature of his right shoulder girdle to stretch the client. **Figure 1b** shows the therapist changing his orientation to place his core behind the line of push of the stretch so that his larger core muscles can be used instead. Note that the therapist has tucked his right elbow inside the anterior superior iliac spine.



Stretching the client's thigh into flexion. **Figure 2a** shows the therapist using shoulder musculature to lift the client's thigh into flexion to stretch the hamstring group. **Figure 2b** shows the client positioned to the near side of the table so that the therapist can place his core under the weight of the client's thigh. **Figure 2c** shows the therapist positioned on the table to align his core under the weight of the client's thigh.

the client's neck into right lateral flexion. Instead of using shoulder musculature to generate this force, larger core muscles are used instead.

Another example of using the core can be seen when stretching the hamstring muscle group of the supine client by moving the client's thigh into flexion. When a client is lying in the middle of the table, a therapist must lean in, making positioning the core of his body behind the force of the stretch difficult. As a result, the therapist must use his shoulder musculature to lift the client's

It Takes a Steady Hand

Another critically important aspect of stretching is the role of the stabilization hand. In Figure 1, the therapist's right hand is the treatment hand because it is doing the actual stretching of the client. The therapist's left hand should be used to act as the stabilization hand, which is equally important. When not stabilized, or held down, the client's left shoulder girdle might elevate, causing much of the stretch of the neck to be lost.

To stabilize the client's shoulder, the therapist needs to