

Dr. Joe Muscolino will be teaching a workshop on clinical orthopedic massage therapy (COMT) techniques in Auckland, NZ on April 4th and 5th, 2012. To register for this workshop or for more information, please visit Dr. Joe's website: www.learnmuscles.com or contact him directly as joe@learnmuscles.com. Visit also his facebook page: *The Art and Science of Kinesiology*.

Clients come for massage therapy for many reasons. Some come for human touch, others for relaxation. Increasingly, clients are also coming for massage to help remedy their musculoskeletal conditions. In fact, for many clients, massage therapy has become their primary treatment choice when first confronted with joint, muscle, and other soft tissue problems. With the understanding and recognition that massage therapy can be a powerful treatment option for musculoskeletal conditions, the massage profession is taking its rightful place in the world of complementary medicine.

Clinical Orthopedic Massage Therapy (COMT)

Working on clients with the intent to remedy musculoskeletal conditions can be termed clinical orthopedic massage therapy (COMT). Although there are many treatment techniques in the world of massage therapy, one technique approach that is extremely valuable when doing COMT is stretching. In essence, stretching is the elongation of muscles and other soft tissues for the purpose of increasing flexibility and range of motion (ROM).

Stretching

Stretching is essentially a mechanical process. This is true whether classic static stretching is performed, with the position of stretch held for a prolonged period of time, usually between 10 and 60 seconds; or dynamic stretching is performed, with the position of stretch held for a shorter period of time, usually between 1 and 5 seconds. Stretching is a mechanical process because the muscles and other soft tissues are physically elongated. This physical elongation helps to break up patterns of adhesions that can decrease flexibility and motion.

Neural Inhibition Stretching

In addition to adhesions, musculature can also be tight because it is being ordered to contract by the nervous system. In other words, its baseline tone is too high, so even when it is supposed to be relaxed, it is contracting excessively. This is where advanced stretching that utilizes neural inhibition can be used effectively. Advanced neural inhibition stretching utilizes proprioceptive reflexes to inhibit, in other words relax, the tone of the musculature. This neural inhibition increases the effectiveness of the mechanical stretch.

There are two nervous system proprioceptive reflexes that

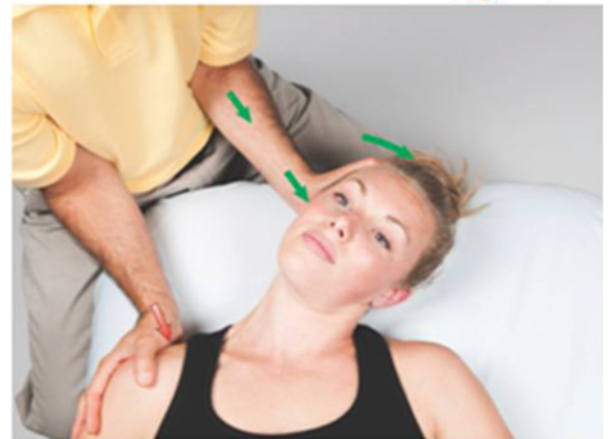
CR Stretching Technique

Following is how CR stretching is performed. For this example, the neck/head right lateral flexor (RLF) functional group of muscles is our target muscle group to be stretched.

Client starting position: Supine.

Therapist starting position: Seated at head of table toward the right corner; the left (treatment stretching) hand is placed on the right side of the client's head, and the right (stabilization) hand placed on the superior surface of the client's right shoulder girdle. (Note: Alternative hand positioning is possible.)

Step 1: Passively stretch the client's neck/head into left lateral flexion until tension is reached (**Figure 1**).



Step 2: Ask the client to take in a breath and then breathe out as she presses against the resistance of your left hand, trying to right laterally flex the neck/head, for a count of approximately 8-10 seconds (**Figure 2**). This causes the RLF target musculature to isometrically contract, triggering the GTO reflex, inhibiting/relaxing it.



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