

*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

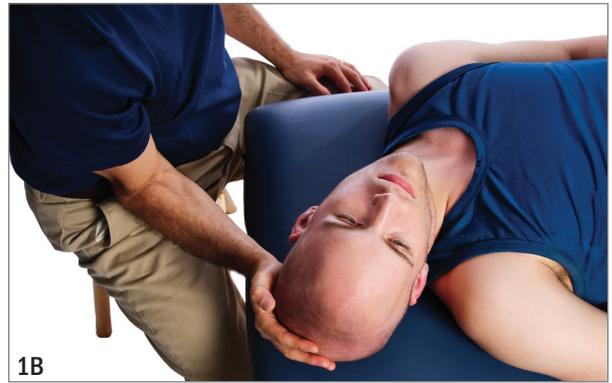
When performing massage, understanding how to employ good body mechanics is wise. Massage is physically intense and the use of proper mechanics allows the therapist to work more efficiently, and therefore expend less effort. However, when massage therapists are working to stretch their clients, the importance 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

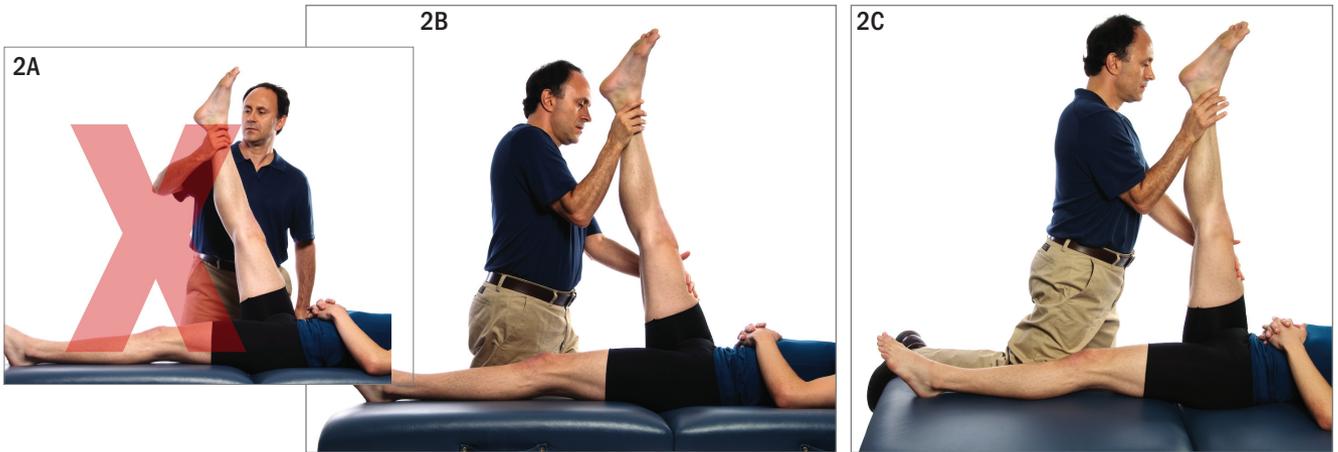
One tenet of body mechanics when doing massage therapy is to always try to work from the core. This principle also applies to stretching. For example, if we want to

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 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 thigh into flexion (Figure 2a).

A smaller therapist working with a large client may find this challenging. If the therapist either positions the client as close to the side of the table as possible (Figure 2b), or positions himself on the table to be under the weight of the client's thigh (Figure 2c), the core can be placed in line with the stretch and core musculature can be used instead.

### 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.

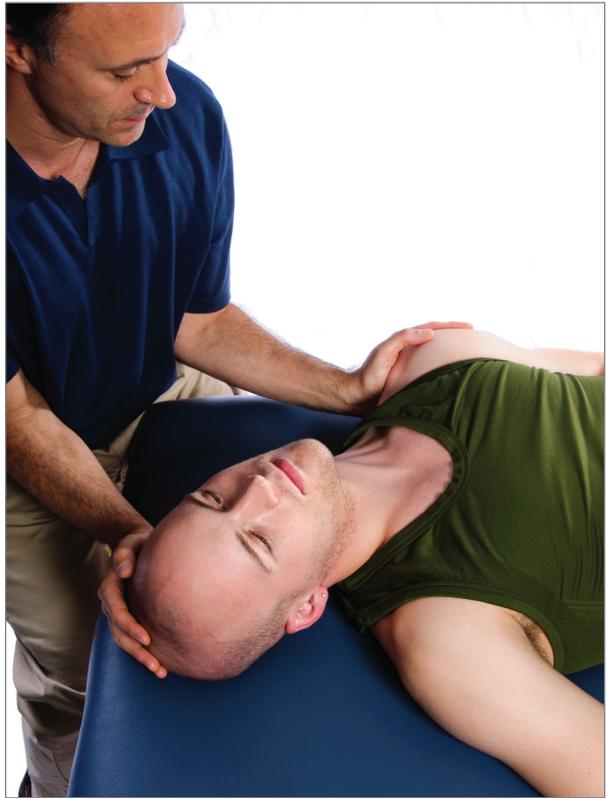
To stabilize the client's shoulder, the therapist needs to press on the client's left shoulder with enough strength to stop it from moving, as seen in Figure 3. If the therapist aligns himself as seen in Figure 3a, then all of the force must be generated by his shoulder musculature. However, if the therapist places his left elbow in front of his core in a similar manner to how the right elbow is placed, then the therapist's core musculature can also be used to stabilize the client. This is seen in Figure 3b.

Another example of the need for the therapist to align

3A



3B



Stabilization of the client's shoulder girdle. **Figure 3a** shows the therapist stabilizing the client's left shoulder girdle by using shoulder musculature. **Figure 3b** shows the therapist placing his core behind the stabilization hand by tucking the left elbow into the core.

4A



4B



Stretching the pectoralis musculature of the seated client. **Figure 4a** illustrates how when the client's trunk is not stabilized, it will rotate to the right resulting in a loss of stretch of the pectoralis musculature. **Figure 4b** shows the therapist using his left hand to stabilize the client's trunk. Note that the therapist has aligned his core and lower extremities with the line of force of the stabilization and has tucked his left elbow into his trunk.

his core with the line of force of the stabilization hand is when stretching the client's pectoralis musculature by bringing the client's arm back into extension and abduction. Even though the therapist's right hand is doing the actual stretch, the left hand has the more difficult and physically strenuous task of stabilizing the client's trunk so that it does not rotate to the right.

Figure 4a shows how the client's trunk rotates when not stabilized. Allowing the client's trunk to rotate in this manner results in a loss of stretch of the pectoralis musculature. Figure 4b shows the same stretch with the therapist placing his left hand on the client's right-sided interscapular region—between the right scapula and spine—to keep the client's trunk from rotating to the right.

Because stabilizing the client's trunk actually requires more effort on the part of the therapist than moving the client's right arm into the stretch, it's more important for the therapist to align his core and lower body with the line of force of the stabilization hand than it is to align the core with the hand that is doing the stretch. By tucking the left elbow into the core, near the ASIS, the therapist can easily stabilize the client's trunk.

Whether the therapist is generating force with the treatment hand or with the stabilization hand, placing the core of the body in line with the force that is being generated is the key to good body mechanics. This requires keeping the elbow in\*, which requires laterally rotating the arm at the shoulder joint. Although this may feel awkward at first, with practice it will feel increasingly more comfortable. It is also more efficient, saving the shoulder musculature from fatigue and injury.

Whether we are massaging or stretching our clients, it is important to apply the principles of good body mechanics so that we are working smart instead of working hard. ■

*\* If the elbow cannot be brought all the way in, keeping it as close to the core as possible increases efficiency and decreases stress upon the therapist's upper extremity musculature.*



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