

The Art and Science of Kinesiology Taping, Part 1



To complement the article “Expert Advice: How can I add kinesiology taping to my massage sessions?” in the July 2014 issue of *MASSAGE Magazine*. Summary: Kinesiology tape has many benefits and potential uses in a massage therapy practice. The author discusses how the tape works, the effects it produces and contraindications for use.

It was difficult to believe all the colors that converged in rainbow hues on the back of my client's leg. It was as if a box of crayons had been strategically melted to form a Picasso interpretation of a high hamstring pull. She was a highly competitive athlete in my gym who had sustained what she thought was a minor muscle strain over the weekend during sprint training. On Monday morning, she stood in my office with a look of desperation and pain on her face—and one gnarly bruise spanning the back of her thigh.

Due to the obvious acuteness of her injury, my immediate treatment plan was to facilitate pain reduction and increase blood and lymph flow to the area by way of decompression, without applying any type of manual therapy. I reached for kinesiology tape.

My client wanted the pink tape with black skulls to adorn her battle scar. I happily obliged with a finger-taping pattern that would aid in increasing circulation and removing cellular waste products from the area. In a few days, my client came back with a much lighter bruise than the crayon-like meltdown she had been sporting before. The lifting effect of the tape had increased fluid flow and acted as a decompression agent, resulting in faded channels within the bruise. Her pain had diminished and she was now ready for more direct manual treatment therapy.

As a licensed massage therapist with a background in strength, conditioning and biomechanics, and with a focus in athletic performance, I see this sort of presentation commonly. Over the last 17 years in practice, 10 of those spent as a licensed massage therapist, my continued education has been largely in understanding the movement and modalities that best serve this population. While I stock many tools in my toolbox, I consistently reach for kinesiology tape. Whether I use myofascial release techniques, Active Release Technique, active isolated stretching or neurokinetic therapy, kinesiology tape complements, reinforces and in many ways strengthens my work.

Art and science

Kinesiology taping has been around for more than 35 years. Chiropractors, physical therapists, athletic trainers and massage therapists have used it for decades, and for many good reasons—all of which apply to the realm of massage therapy.

Kinesiology tape has been shown to reduce pain; positively affect fluid mechanics; improve posture and muscle function; speed recovery; and improve sporting performance. That's a giant basket of good reasons, if you ask me. Today, you'd be hard-pressed not to see the colorful, cool-looking tape on amateur and pro athletes in various sports, as well as folks leaving physical therapy appointments at which they've been treated for common ailments such as knee replacements, shoulder injuries and low back pain.

Not all tape nor taping education programs are equal, however. There are many brands: RockTape, Spider Tech, and Kinesio Tape, among others, and a few schools of thought on how to apply it. Thanks to some forward-thinking folks, the evolution of application and successful client outcomes have led to a more global and more effective method of taping.

Pain is not the only player in the game of dysfunction. Those of us who apply tape in our practice are also able to invoke positive changes in biomechanics, performance, posture, awareness and neuropathies. If you've read *Anatomy Trains* by Thomas Myers, or *Movement* by Gray Cook, you understand the importance of visualizing movement patterns and treatment along the kinetic chain.

Once a breakdown is identified in a movement pattern, tape can be applied to facilitate awareness and better biomechanics. This is contrary to the old method of taping muscles or joints in isolation. Nothing about the human form is static or isolated when it comes to function. Our client population is much better served when our methods of healing are dynamic. The ability to couple knowledge of movement with an effective toolbox of treatment modalities will set you apart from other providers.

Tape movement, not muscles. This is brilliantly simple and enormously effective. This ideology has resonated with me from the very moment it was taught during my education in taping, and it has proven itself every time.

Why tape? And, more importantly, how can tape benefit our work as massage therapists and benefit our clients? If you're in the field of manual therapy, you already have a grasp on the benefits, the whys, and the how-tos of moving tissues, fluids and fascia, while increasing range of motion. The power of touch is remarkable. That's why we do it. But how many times have your clients left your office and said, "I felt great for a while, but the pain came back"?

If you understand the role of stability, synergists and compensation patterns, you understand that a returning symptom points to the fact that the site of pain isn't necessarily the root of the issue and other contributing factors need to be addressed. Once these underlying issues are discovered, kinesiology tape can reinforce therapies to more properly address not only the site of discomfort but also the cause. With taping, you can send clients out the door with the benefits

of movement feedback, postural awareness and correction, stabilization and pain reduction. That's super for your clients—and even better for your business.

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