Active Release Technique (ART)

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History

- Developed by P. Michael Leahy, DC, CCSP
- Patented in 1990
- Treatment protocol includes over 500 distinct therapeutic movements.
- Certification available to:
  - Licensed PT, OT, Chiropractors, PTA
  - Must have soft-tissue malpractice insurance.
Who Benefits?

- patients with acute injuries (tears, pulls, contractures)
- patients with overuse injuries & microtrauma tears
Effects of Scar Tissue

- Restricts soft tissue
- Weakens and shortens muscles
- Increases soft tissue tension which can lead to inflammation and tendonitis
- Can compress nerves
- All of these can lead to pain!
Technique

• Similar to deep tissue massage & myofascial release
• Therapist breaks up scar tissue
  – Applies manual pressure while lengthening tissue (patient moves muscle through ROM)
  – Deep pressure can be painful

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaK7N8CYr8U
ART in Action

• It is the combination of site specific manual pressure with precise patient movement (usually flexion or extension) that makes ART unique to other manual therapy.
• Patient’s active movement puts the A in ART.
• Trained therapist uses their hands to evaluate the underlying soft tissue.
• More patient conditions that may benefit from ART: headaches, plantar fasciitis, sciatica, shin splints, tennis elbow.
Benefits of Breaking up Scar Tissue

- Muscle is able to lengthen which can increase ROM and strength
- Muscle, tendon, ligaments are able to move more freely
- Takes pressure off the nerve and can relieve pain!
Pilot Study

• 5 participants with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)
• Tools: Boston Questionnaire (BQ~ self administered outcome measure) & EMG exam
• Treatment: ART therapy 3x week for 2 weeks
• Participants showed significant improvement in BQ but no significant difference in EMG.

• Most research on ART has been case studies or small pilot studies.
Conclusion

• Pilot studies and case studies have shown effectiveness of ART. Broader research with larger populations and long term follow-up should follow.

• ART, in conjunction with a rehabilitation program, may be a good approach for people experiencing pain due to overuse injuries and buildup of scar tissue.

• As with any approach, it is important to note it will not work for everyone.