

THIS MONTH WE TRY...

FUNCTIONAL FASCIAL TAPING

Could this revolutionary taping method be an instant injury solution? **Anastasia Stephens** reports

You suffer a joint or muscle injury. Mainstream advice would be to tape up the area, stay still and wait for it to heal. Yet a revolutionary technique that claims to speed recovery recommends just the opposite: the injury is taped in a way that makes the joint more flexible. Not only do you move around as normal, but you also get instant pain relief – sometimes as much as 60 per cent.

It may sound too good to be true, but Functional Fascial Taping (FFT) is grabbing the attention of athletes and dancers worldwide, and for good reason. 'I've used it on more than 50 patients so far and 90 per cent have experienced immediate pain reduction and increased range of movement,' says Gavin Burt, an osteopath who is pioneering FFT in the UK.

The method, which combines approaches from physiotherapy, soft tissue therapy and osteopathy, uses sports tape to stretch out the fascia, the thin layer of connective tissue overlying muscles and joints. 'When a joint or muscle is strained, the fascia gets torn and pulled out of place,' says Burt. 'The fascia contains a complex network of nerves, so when it's damaged it generates pain signals. FFT pulls the fascia back into alignment. This reduces pain, and less pain means more movement.'

And rather than movement aggravating the injury, it actually seems to encourage healing. 'Researchers will have to look into it, but this may be due to increasing blood supply to the area, or normalising nerve signals,' says Burt.

Could FFT help my carpal tunnel syndrome? After testing my wrists with a series of movement and pain measures, Burt carefully applies a

piece of tape to each wrist. Afterwards, I type at a keyboard, an activity that usually causes mild pain and muscle weakness in my wrists and hands. To my surprise and relief, my hands feel stronger and there's no pain.

HISTORY

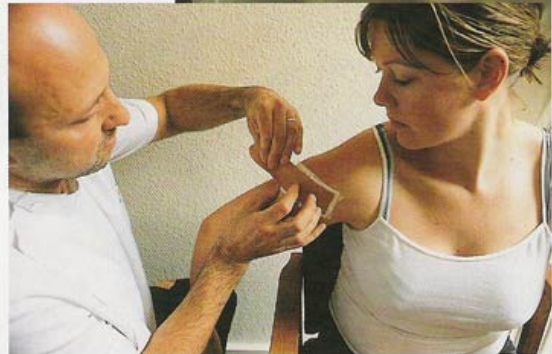
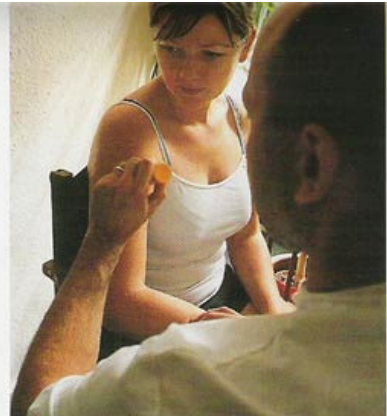
Ron Alexander, leading soft tissue therapist for the Australian Ballet, developed FFT just over 10 years ago. 'Dancers were prone to suffering injuries mid-performance but often needed to get back on stage fast,' he says. 'I wanted to find something to get them back dancing with minimal pain and maximum flexibility.' The method is now being taught to practitioners in Australia and worldwide.

EVIDENCE

As FFT is fairly new, most evidence supporting the method comes in the form of testimonials; thousands of patients, athletes and professional dancers will attest to its benefits. However, the technique is accredited by the Australian Physiotherapy Association and the first double-blind trials to assess its effectiveness are underway at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

WHO SHOULD USE IT?

FFT can be used on any type of joint and soft tissue injury, whether it's the ligament, muscle or tendon that has been damaged. 'I've used FFT



to help recovery from sprains and damaged ligaments, and for chronic inflammation of tissue around joints,' says Burt. 'It's most useful for sub-acute and chronic conditions. For patients with plantar fasciitis [a painful inflammation of the arch of the foot] it has given 75 to 100 per cent relief for a condition that normally takes months to resolve.'

CONTRAINDICATIONS

FFT shouldn't be applied if a joint is fractured or broken; practitioners should check this before they start treatment. The tape shouldn't be used on fragile skin, open wounds or by people with allergies to sports tape.

COST

Treatment is simple: it can take as little as five minutes to apply tape to a straightforward knee injury. 'You get instant results or nothing at all,' says Burt. However, FFT is rarely used alone; most people need osteopathy at the same time. Most patients require around two to three sessions, costing £40 each. After several appointments, patients can be shown how to apply the tape themselves if needed.

RESOURCES

■ For information about FFT, visit www.fft.net.au, or e-mail info@fft.net.au.

■ To contact osteopath Gavin Burt, call 0800-279 7570, or visit www.gavinburt.co.uk.

'It worked for me'

Kira Owens, 34, is an accessories designer from north London. 'A few months ago, I strained my right Achilles tendon during a game of tennis. Physical activity caused me such pain, I just couldn't do it. After a month of rest and no real improvement, Gavin Burt suggested FFT. First, he got me to hop on my bad leg, which was painful. Then he applied the tape and I hopped again, with no pain whatsoever. It was fantastic. I wore the tape for about three weeks, during which my Achilles tendon healed. The great thing was, I didn't have to rest my ankle at all; after the first appointment, I could take up tennis immediately.'