

Mattes' Active Isolated Stretching (AIS)

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Whenever I take a course and can't wait until I get home to call up some patients who did not respond as well as I thought they should, I know I have spent a valuable weekend. Without any hesitation at all on my part, I can say Mattes' method of stretching, which really is a very effective soft-tissue method of treatment, should be part of the armamentarium of every practitioner who deals with the musculoskeletal system.

I recently spent four days taking the course. There were approximately 133 people present, with enough assistants who really were excellent students of the Mattes method to help with the hands-on process. Many of them have been associated with Mattes for years. Aaron Mattes is a world-class kinesiotherapist and massage therapist who has treated many of the rich and famous for more than 30 years. Patients from all over the world have sought out his healing methods.

He presents a method of stretching that appears simplistic, but requires specific positioning and technique between the practitioner and patient. For example, he demonstrates how to stretch the piriformis muscle from the standpoint of exerting maximum pressure on either the anterior sacral attachment or the greater trochanteric location. As he explains, it's necessary to release these external hip rotators in order to release pelvic distortions and pressure on the hip, and to help free sciatic plexus nerve pressure. Based on the position of a stretch, it's possible, for example, to individually stretch (in order) the gracilis, adductor magnus, adductor longus, adductor brevis and finally, the pectinius.

According to Mattes himself, "The Mattes Method incorporates a key concept, which states that only relaxed myofascial structures will allow themselves to be optimally stretched. Adhering to Wolff's and Sherrington's Laws, the Mattes Method facilitates optimal myofascial stretching of isolated muscles without activating a protective myotatic reflex contraction. The Mattes Method utilizes a gradual stretch of no greater than 2.0 seconds, promoting full range of motion and flexibility without activating antagonistic muscle group contraction."¹

This muscle-stretching technique creates a plastic deformation. Before taking this course, I was convinced that prolonged stretching was the only way to create plasticity, as in a shoulder adhesive capsulitis, but repetitively performing this two-second stretch at least eight to 10 times on relaxed tissue starts to create an almost painless melting of the fascia. "Repetitive isotonic muscle contractions deliver greater amounts of blood, lymph, and nutrition to specific regions than static or isometric muscle contractions."¹ A yoga instructor I recently treated was amazed as to how soon her range of cervical/thoracic motion returned, and she has been stretching daily for years.

Freeing up the fascia always allows easier manipulation of the spinal or sacral segments if it still is necessary after the Mattes method. I have found that using Graston Technique instruments while the patient performs the two-second stretch is also very beneficial. What is very important is teaching the patient to perform the method at home.

I suppose that after so many years leaning over patients, my posture has slumped somewhat.

Mattes used me as a volunteer during the course, and I feel that my shoulders, back and head are more erect than ever now. The immediate changes that occur are outstanding.

Reference

1. Mattes AL. *Active Isolated Stretching: The Mattes Method*. Sarasota, Fla.: Aaron Mattes Therapy, 2000.

JANUARY 2007