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Tape to Heal

Taping for functional correction in sports medicine PT practices **By Rebecca Knutsen**

Therapeutic tape, applied over and around muscles in order to assist and give support or to prevent over-contraction, is widely accepted in the rehabilitation arena as an effective adjunct to formal physical therapy. With therapeutic tape applied to provide support, patients rehabilitating from sports injuries maintain full range of motion while participating in normal everyday activities.

"With the rising cost of healthcare, providers and patients are looking for solutions to hasten the recovery process," said Heather Moore, PT, DPT, CKTP, owner and physical therapist at Total Performance Physical Therapy in North Wales, Pa. "Taping has a profound effect on the outcomes of our patients. With proper training, patients can apply the tape from the comfort of their own homes."

Taping is a go-to in Moore's therapy toolbox. "Any condition I can treat with manual therapy including swelling, pain and strains can usually be followed up with a piece of tape. The patients I tape enjoy benefits longer than those I do not tape," she said.

When it comes to using this intervention, the patient assessment is important, according to Karena Wu, PT, MS, CSCS, CPI, CKTP, owner and operator of ActiveCare Physical Therapy in New York City. "To address functional dysfunction and decrease pain, the emphasis needs to be on joint mobilization first to treat the problem instead of treating the symptoms," she shared.

Moore sees the best outcomes when she first identifies the problem to correct for, and second, uses the correct taping technique. "I typically try the same taping technique no more than twice on a patient, and if there is no visible or reported benefit, then I move on to another technique," she explained.

Moore uses therapeutic tape in the treatment of knee pain and swelling, lateral and medial epicondylitis, back pain, posture issues, plantar fasciitis, ankle sprains, posterior tibial tendinitis, shin splints, and IT band tendinitis. Manual therapy is at the center of all patient treatments at Total Performance Physical Therapy, which recently launched Total Performance, a new program that offers cutting-edge running and training programs for beginners to professional athletes.

"When a patient injures her knee, rehab shouldn't just focus on the joint, but rather strengthen the whole kinetic chain," shared Wu, who treats a variety of athletes in the New York City metro area, from professional sprinters and volleyball players to weekend warriors, marathoners and golfers.

Wu's approach is to prevent re-injury while teaching the patient body awareness. Wu is a manual therapist with an emphasis on Maitland mobilization techniques and Pilates. She uses modalities such as electrical stimulation and ultrasound on a limited basis but feels that taping is an applicable therapeutic tool in the patient's progress.

"Taping works on a neurological level so the patient receives feedback," Wu said. "It helps to restore normal joint mobility and the patient feels little to no pain."

Taping for sports injuries can limit motion, and prevent overstretch of tissues, joint



hypermobility and re-injury. A physical therapist may choose to tape for functional correction to either assist or limit a motion.

Functional correction is a specific taping technique that provides sensory stimulus. "Functional correction can be used to spring-assist a joint," Moore said. "A patient who is in plantar flexion, for example, can have a functional taping correction applied to assist him to achieve dorsiflexion."

Wu believes taping is good for functional correction because it reminds the patient not to go into problematic postures. "The tape cannot prevent the patient from resuming bad posture but it will cause discomfort, so it's a trigger to correct the posture," she shared.

Moore uses tape to limit the overuse of a muscle that is sore or healing, such as shin splints. "Many athletes also have hypermobile joints and this type of taping technique can be used to limit the excessive mobility, which predisposes athletes to a greater chance of injury," she said.

The benefits of therapeutic taping last long after the therapy session has ended. "The patients will accomplish even more gains at home," Moore said. These might include decreased swelling and pain, and increased range of motion and muscle contraction.

Perhaps the best thing about taping, Moore explained, is that no matter what technique is used, the tape will not interfere with movement. "The patient can go about everyday activities without restriction," she said.



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A patient with a severe ankle sprain, for example, can enjoy the therapeutic benefit of taping all day once she comes out of the boot. "Tape is worn 24/7, in bed and in the shower," Wu explained. "Because of elastic recoil, there is a lift on the skin when tape is applied, which adds more space under the tape, allowing more blood flow. An injured area has poor circulation. Taping results in increased tissue healing and decreased time healing because of increased fluid movement."

Tape preparation and application are important for successful outcomes. When applied incorrectly, Wu explained, it minimizes the therapeutic benefit, peels off early, and irritates the patient's skin.

"Tape handling and cutting is a specific skill," observed Wu. "User error occurs when the therapist doesn't prepare the skin appropriately or doesn't apply the tape correctly."

Therapists need to be on the lookout for skin irritation, because tape is worn for up to five days at a time and is often reapplied over the course of several weeks, Wu told *ADVANCE*.

"It's important to check for skin breakdown during tape use," she explained.

The type of tape is important too. The material of athletic tape doesn't breathe, is irritating and has zinc, which people can be allergic to, Wu shared. Therapeutic tape is more tolerable because the skin can breathe.

The quality of tape and the training the therapist receives are also important factors in the success of this modality. "The market is flooded with tape brands and types, so you really need to pay attention to quality," Wu noted.

Wu prefers a brand that is 100% cotton and sticks without being overly sticky. "Some other brands are made of nylon and are heavier weight," she shared. "These are not ideal for particular patient populations, such as pediatrics or geriatrics."

Wu's clinic uses precut tape. "I didn't think I would like it," she said. "But now I can't live without it for many reasons."

One reason is time efficiency: Wu transfers the time saved by not measuring and cutting the tape to the patient. Second, if the patient

is traveling or being discharged from therapy, he can be trained to apply the precut tape himself. Finally, Wu said, she doesn't have to worry about the tape fraying from an inaccurate cut, which can affect the application.

"There are many different brands out there, all claiming to have some magic formula," Moore said. "You need to find the tape that works best for you and your patients."

Moore's clinic uses a couple of different brands, as some patients can tolerate some better than others. "I personally avoid precut tape," she shared. "Every patient and their bodies are different so I prefer to use a tape that allows me to pick the length, how it is applied, and where it is applied."

Wu believes all clinicians would benefit from tidying up their taping skills. "Many need to learn how to cut the tape properly," she said. "Taping is far more effective when done right." ■

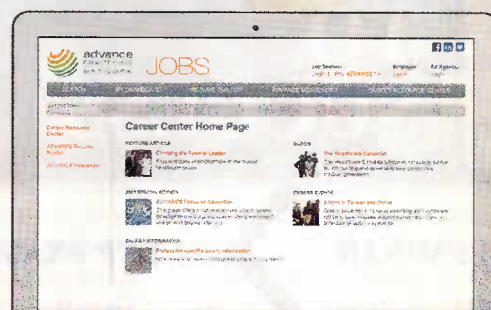
Rebecca Knutsen is on staff at ADVANCE. Contact: rknutsen@advanceweb.com

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