

THE ELITE HEALERS RECOVERY BLUEPRINT

How Serious Athletes Structure Massage Around Training

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NYC's Performance Recovery Clinic

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INTRODUCTION

Why Most Athletes Leave Recovery on the Table

There's one question I get asked time and time again as a sports massage therapist: "How often should I get a massage?"

It sounds simple. It isn't. And the fact that most athletes answer it incorrectly is exactly why so many of them plateau, break down, or spend months fighting injuries that should have been addressed in weeks.

The truth is that massage frequency is not a fixed number. It is a variable that changes based on where you are in your training cycle, what your body is trying to accomplish right now, how hard you have been working, and how serious you are about staying in the game long term.

Over years of treating NYC's athletes, I developed a system that organizes these variables into three primary categories: Recovery, Repair, and Maintenance. When you understand these three categories and know where you fall at any given point in your training year, massage stops being a luxury you book when something hurts and becomes a clinical tool that keeps you performing at your highest level.

That is what this guide is about. Not generic advice. A structured framework built in the clinic, tested on real athletes, and refined through two decades of hands-on work with runners, strength athletes, racket sport players, and active professionals across New York City.

This guide covers the three-category recovery framework, sport-specific massage protocols for runners, strength athletes, and racket sport players, age-adjusted maintenance schedules, the integration of sports and medical massage for serious athletes, and what makes the Elite Healers approach different from any other sports massage program in NYC.

CHAPTER 1

The Three-Category Framework

Recovery, Repair, and Maintenance

Not every massage session serves the same purpose. Before you can answer how often you should get a massage, you need to answer what the massage is for. Here are the three categories that define every session I do with an athlete.

Category 1: Recovery Bodywork

Recovery massage is organized around your training and competition schedule. It is what you book after a major effort: a marathon, a tournament, a competition, or a particularly brutal training block. The primary goal is to accelerate your return to full training capacity.

This is not a full body massage. It targets the muscles that carried the load during your event, the structures that got pushed to their limits and now need targeted intervention to recover efficiently.

Timing: When to Book Your Recovery Session

Same day is acceptable, but your body needs to go through a cool down protocol first. Get your body out of "fight or flight" mode and get it into "rest and digest" mode first. The reason day-one or day-two tends to produce better results is not that the massage itself is different. It is that after a sleep cycle your body can distinguish general fatigue from actual dysfunction. You will feel more specifically where the tissue needs attention, which means your therapist can be more precise. As a rule, aim for within one to two days post-event. Three days is the outer limit before the recovery window starts to close.

Category 2: Repair Massage

Everyone gets injured at some point. Repair massage is what you need when you are in active recovery from a specific injury, whether that is a muscle strain, tendinopathy, post-surgical recovery, or a condition that has been limiting your training for weeks.

Repair massage works as a complement to physical therapy, not a replacement for it. The two modalities work best in combination. If you are attending PT, book your massage after your physical therapy appointment. The PT mobilizes the joint and works on movement patterns. The massage follows up by addressing the soft tissue restrictions that physical therapy alone cannot fully resolve. Together they create a recovery outcome that neither modality achieves independently.

Repair massage is specifically designed to break down scar tissue, realign the fascia around the injured area, and eliminate the trigger points and muscle knots that develop in compensation patterns around an injury site.

Injury Severity	Recommended Frequency	Estimated Duration
Minor (superficial strain, mild sprain)	1 session per week	3 to 5 weeks
Moderate (grade 2 sprain, overuse injury, tendinopathy)	1 to 2 sessions per week	6 to 8 weeks
Severe (grade 3 injury, post-surgical recovery, chronic multi-factor)	2 sessions per week initially	10 weeks or more

Note: These timelines assume you are also resting or modifying activity appropriately. An athlete who needs to continue walking on an injured leg, or who keeps training through a shoulder strain, should expect a longer recovery arc.

Category 3: Maintenance Massage

Maintenance is the goal. It is the stage every athlete should be working toward and staying in. Think of it as your tune-up schedule: the regular intervention that prevents minor dysfunction from becoming injury, keeps your tissue quality high across training blocks, and maintains the mobility your sport demands.

Over time, regardless of how fit you are, muscles tighten, knots form, and compensation patterns develop. Maintenance massage catches these issues at the micro level before they become clinical problems. It is far less expensive in time, money, and missed training to maintain your tissue than it is to repair it after it breaks down.

CHAPTER 2

Structuring Massage Around Your Training Cycle

The single most important concept in this entire guide is this: the right massage at the wrong time in your training cycle delivers a fraction of the result. Timing is not a minor detail. It is the variable that determines whether massage accelerates your performance or interferes with it.

An athlete in preseason or the off-season needs a fundamentally different massage approach from an athlete in-season, in a peak training block, or in the week before a major competition. Most sports massage programs do not go deep enough into this. Here is how I structure it.

Off-Season and Base Phase

This is the highest-value window for structural correction work. Training volume is lower, which means the body can absorb deeper tissue intervention without compromising recovery between sessions. This is the time to address the chronic patterns that accumulated across the previous season, restore full joint mobility, and correct the movement compensations that developed under competitive load. Session frequency can be higher here because the body is not simultaneously managing high training stress. Bi-weekly sessions are appropriate for most athletes in this phase.

Pre-Season and Build Phase

As training volume increases, massage frequency should scale with it. The focus shifts from structural correction to tissue maintenance and injury prevention. Your therapist should know your training load during this phase because the session needs to be calibrated to support increasing physical demand without over-stressing tissue that is already being pushed in training. Weekly to bi-weekly sessions depending on training intensity.

In-Season and Peak Phase

During the competitive season, the priority is performance optimization and rapid recovery between training sessions and competitions. Sessions in this phase are not the time for deep structural work that leaves the athlete sore for two days. They are targeted, specific, and designed to keep the primary movers functioning at full capacity through a demanding schedule. Weekly sessions are recommended for serious competitive athletes during in-season play.

Competition Week

The week of a major competition, marathon, or tournament requires a specific approach. Deep structural work is off the table. The session should be lighter, focused on activation and mobility rather than tissue release. The goal is to arrive at the start line with full range of motion and no compensatory tension patterns restricting performance. Timing matters here too: aim for two to three days before competition, not the day before.

Post-Season

After a competitive season ends, the body needs a different kind of attention. This is often when the accumulated damage from months of training and competition becomes apparent. Post-season is the time for deeper repair work targeting the structures that were managed through the season but never fully addressed. Think of it as a comprehensive tissue audit before beginning the off-season restoration process.

CHAPTER 3

Sport-Specific Protocols

What Your Body Actually Needs Based on Your Sport

Every sport creates its own pattern of tissue stress. The runner's body breaks down differently from the strength athlete's body, which breaks down differently from the tennis player's body. Generic sports massage ignores this. At Elite Healers, every therapist is trained in sport-specific protocols for fourteen athletic disciplines because the treatment needs to match the demand pattern, not just the location of the pain.

Here are the three most common athletic populations we treat, with the specific tissue failure patterns I see walk through the door consistently.

RUNNERS AND ENDURANCE ATHLETES

Primary failure pattern:

The most consistent issue I see in runners is knee pain driven by a combination of tight quadriceps, shortened adductors (inner thigh), and overloaded hip flexors. When the hip flexor complex is involved, the psoas is almost always implicated too, and because the psoas attaches directly to the lumbar spine, what presents as knee pain frequently has a lower back component that the runner has not connected.

This pattern is especially predictable in two windows: the early spring, when runners who have been relatively inactive through winter push their mileage too quickly and the body goes into shock from the sudden load, and the marathon training build, when long runs start exceeding twelve miles and overuse patterns that have been building for weeks finally become symptomatic.

What your sessions should address:

- Quadriceps and IT band: the primary drivers of lateral knee compression in runners
- Adductor complex: frequently undertreated and directly implicated in knee tracking issues
- Hip flexors and psoas: the connection between lower back pain and knee dysfunction
- Calves, Achilles, and plantar fascia: the posterior chain under highest load per mile
- Glutes and piriformis: essential for hip stability and reducing the lateral stress on the knee

Timing for Runners

Schedule sessions after your highest mileage days, not before. Once your weekly long run exceeds twelve miles, weekly massage becomes a performance tool rather than a recovery luxury. During marathon taper week, book a lighter session two to three days before race day, not the day before.

STRENGTH ATHLETES AND WEIGHTLIFTERS

Primary failure pattern:

Strength athletes typically train a push-to-pull imbalance. High bench press volume, overhead pressing, and front-dominant training without corresponding pull volume chronically shortens the pec minor and anterior deltoid, which anteriorly tilts the scapula and reduces subacromial space. The result is shoulder impingement and rotator cuff dysfunction that the lifter often treats as a shoulder problem when it is actually a pec minor and thoracic mobility problem.

The secondary pattern is lumbar and posterior chain restriction from heavy squat and deadlift volume. Chronically shortened hip flexors and thoracic paraspinals restrict the neutral spine position the lifts require, forcing the lumbar spine into compensatory positions under load.

What your sessions should address:

- Pec minor and anterior shoulder: the primary driver of impingement in pressing athletes
- Thoracic paraspinals and lats: essential for neutral spine in squats, deadlifts, and overhead pressing
- Hip flexors and adductors: for squat depth and lumbar decompression
- Forearm flexors: grip fatigue is cumulative across a training week in pulling movements
- Rotator cuff: the supraspinatus and infraspinatus need direct work after high pressing volume

Timing for Strength Athletes

Book sessions 24 to 48 hours after your heaviest sessions, not immediately before. Deload weeks are the highest-value window for deeper structural work. During a competition or peak powerlifting block, increase to weekly sessions focused on tissue quality and movement efficiency rather than deep structural change.

RACKET SPORT ATHLETES: TENNIS AND SQUASH

Primary failure pattern:

Tennis players present with lateral epicondylitis (tennis elbow) as the most common overuse complaint, driven by repetitive wrist extension under load across backhand mechanics and off-center contact. The critical clinical point is that this is rarely isolated to the elbow. The extensor chain from the forearm up through the shoulder and into the posterior capsule is almost always involved.

Tennis and squash players also present with significant hip issues from the lateral movement demands of both sports, and squash players in particular develop knee pain from the deep diving mechanics required to reach low balls, a pattern similar to what I see in runners but driven by different mechanics.

Do not underestimate how much running both sports involve. Across a competitive match, a tennis or squash player puts in serious mileage. The lower extremity overuse patterns develop just as they do in dedicated runners, but the player rarely identifies themselves as a running athlete.

What your sessions should address:

- Forearm extensor chain: from wrist extensors through the lateral elbow for tennis elbow management
- Posterior shoulder and rotator cuff: for serving mechanics and overhead shot recovery
- Hip flexors and adductors: lateral movement demands load these structures heavily across a match
- Knee and patellar tendon: particularly in squash athletes managing diving mechanics
- Calf and Achilles complex: the posterior chain under split-step load across every point played

CHAPTER 4

The Art of Aging

How Massage Frequency Should Change as You Get Older

Age is a variable that most massage frequency guides ignore. It should not be. The older you get, the more your tissue needs consistent maintenance to stay functional, because recovery takes longer, tissue quality changes, and the consequences of letting dysfunction go unaddressed compound faster.

Here is how I structure maintenance frequency across age groups, based on what I have seen work clinically across hundreds of client cases.

Age Group	Activity Level	Recommended Frequency
Under 25	Any	Every 6 to 8 weeks
26 to 55	Moderate exercise	Every 6 weeks (plus or minus 2 weeks)
26 to 55	Intense training or physically demanding work	Every 2 to 4 weeks
26 to 55	Professional or full-time athlete	Weekly
56 to 65	Active	Every 4 weeks
65 to 75	Active	Every 3 weeks
75 and over	Any	Every 2 weeks

The logic behind tightening frequency with age is straightforward. After age 25 we begin to lose approximately one percent of muscle mass per year if we are not actively training against it. Tissue quality declines, recovery takes longer, and the compensation patterns that develop from years of activity or inactivity become more entrenched.

What I call "the art of aging" is the combination of regular maintenance massage with a consistent functional training program. These two tools together slow the physical consequences of aging more effectively than either one alone. The goal is not just to stay pain-free. It is to remain a fully functional, active, independent person for as long as possible and to do it with quality of life intact.

CHAPTER 5

When Sports Massage Becomes Medical Massage

Most athletes draw a sharp line between sports massage and medical massage. That line does not reflect clinical reality.

Athletic recovery and medical massage exist on a continuum. A runner managing IT band syndrome needs sports massage. The same runner who undergoes knee surgery now needs medical massage protocols for scar tissue management, post-surgical edema reduction, and graduated tissue loading. The athlete has not changed. The clinical requirement has.

The most serious athletes I work with, not necessarily professional, but serious in their commitment to performance and recovery, eventually need both skill sets from their therapist. They deal with real injuries. Some of those injuries require surgery. Post-surgical recovery is not a sports massage situation. It requires knowledge of surgical protocols, tissue healing timelines, scar tissue behavior, and the specific contraindications that apply at each stage of recovery.

Medical massage becomes essential when dealing with:

- Post-surgical recovery from ACL repair, rotator cuff surgery, or spinal procedures
- Chronic conditions like frozen shoulder, carpal tunnel syndrome, or piriformis syndrome
- Nerve-related pain patterns including sciatica where the tissue component can be addressed
- Scar tissue from previous injuries that is now limiting movement years later
- Conditions that co-occur with athletic training such as TMJ dysfunction from clenching under load

At Elite Healers, our therapists are trained in both sports massage and medical massage protocols. When your condition crosses from athletic recovery into clinical rehabilitation, you do not need to find a different provider. The same team that manages your training cycle recovery can manage your post-surgical tissue work.

Important Note

Medical massage works best as a complement to your healthcare team, not a replacement for it. If you are managing a serious injury or post-surgical recovery, keep your orthopedic provider, physical therapist, and massage therapist in communication with each other. The outcomes when these modalities are coordinated are consistently better than when they operate in isolation.

CHAPTER 6

The Elite Healers Difference

There are a lot of skilled massage therapists in New York City. What makes Elite Healers different is not any single technique. It is the system behind the treatment.

Most sports massage programs treat the symptom in front of them. A runner comes in with knee pain and the therapist works the knee. A strength athlete has shoulder impingement and the therapist works the shoulder. That approach produces temporary results because it treats the location of the pain, not the pattern producing it.

The Elite Healers proprietary method starts with the athlete. How do they move? Where are the imbalances in that movement? What sport are they training for? What does that sport demand from the body specifically? And critically, where are they in their training cycle right now?

That last variable is one most sports massage programs do not address with enough depth. An athlete coming in three weeks before their marathon needs something fundamentally different from the same athlete coming in the week after finishing it. An athlete in their competitive season needs a different session than the same athlete in their off-season base phase. The timing of the session relative to the training cycle is not a minor detail to note in the intake. It is the central variable that determines what the session should accomplish.

The Elite Healers method was developed over years of clinical practice, refined through time spent working and researching at a university level, and validated by outcomes with hundreds of athletes across fourteen different disciplines. Every therapist on the team is trained in this method. When you book at Elite Healers, you are not booking a therapist. You are accessing a system.

A Final Word from Adam

If you take one thing from this guide, let it be this: massage is not something you do when something hurts. It is something you do to make sure fewer things hurt, fewer things break down, and your ability to keep training stays intact across months and years, not just weeks.

The athletes I have watched perform at their highest levels over the longest careers are not the ones with the most talent or the hardest training programs. They are the ones who took their recovery as seriously as their training. They understood that the session on the table was part of the work, not a break from it.

If you are in New York City and you are serious about your performance, your recovery, and staying in the game for the long term, my team is ready to build a treatment plan around where you are and where you are going.

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