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The Art of Self-Massage with a Tennis Ball

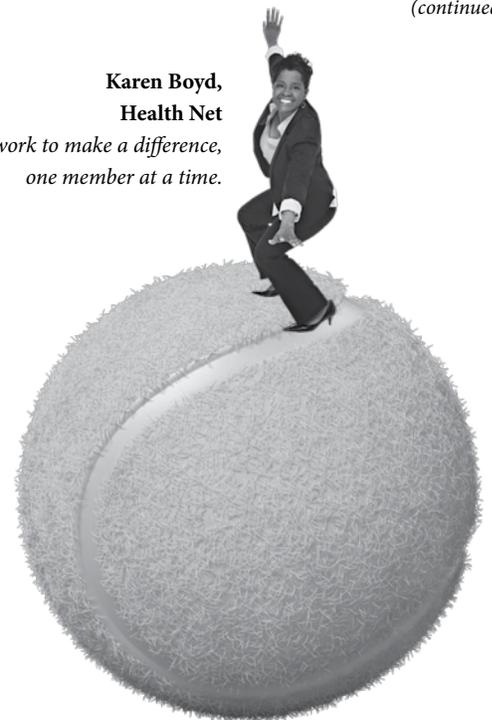
Who doesn't love a massage? And who wishes to have massages more often? If done right, a self-massage can be a form of maintenance between massages given by a trained therapist because it can break up adhesions or "knots" before they become problems. Before you dive into daily self-massages, here are some guidelines:

- **Massage moderation:** More is not always better. Avoid working one area for more than 10 or 15 minutes. Instead, pay attention to your entire body and address all the muscle groups. A few minutes a day is better than once a week for half an hour.
- **Don't try to bully the ache away:** A common mistake is to over-massage an already inflamed area, which can lead to more inflammation and a longer recovery period. Work on a spot for up to 10 to 15 minutes then move on.
- **Ease up:** Our body's muscles and connective tissues are complex and sensitive; they react to pressure, heat and speed differently. With pressure, it's a matter of easing into it and not going too hard. Going too hard too fast causes the muscle to seize up rather than release. Think of warming up into the massage like you would a workout.
- **Know your limits:** Professional massage therapists spend years learning and applying specific techniques. Self-massage is excellent upkeep, but have the wisdom to recognize when a problem calls for a professional. If a muscle does not respond well to self-massage, or you are experiencing intense pain, see your doctor.

(continued)

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*We work to make a difference,
one member at a time.*



Tennis balls are excellent for breaking up tension in hard to reach areas, and are easy to keep handy in the office or gym bag. The basic idea of tennis ball massage is to trap the ball between your body and something else; this is usually either the floor or a wall.

The goal of the tennis ball massage is to achieve a feeling of “release” or “softening” of the tissue in the area you are working by applying just the right amount of pressure for a period of time. The sensation or feeling you experience after the massage should be satisfying, not painful or sore. If you are gritting your teeth or holding your breath, you’re using way too much pressure. Ease off, relax and remember to breathe.

Here are some tips on using a tennis ball to self-massage common problem areas:

- **Back:** Place the tennis ball on the desired spot of your back, and ease your weight into the ball until the ball is comfortably wedged between you and the wall. Lower your body up and down, or shift your body from side to side to allow the ball to knead the focus area. Slowly increase the pressure for a deeper massage.

- **Hips/Glutes:** Ease your body weight on top of the tennis ball until it is wedged between the wall and your hip or glutes. Shift your weight to allow the tennis ball to knead in circles, focusing on the tense area.
- **Foot:** Rest your foot on top of the tennis ball and take the majority of your body weight off of that foot by sitting or using something for balance. Gradually apply more pressure to the foot on the ball as you roll your sole across it in long strokes from the base of the heel and up to the ball of your foot.
- **Calves:** Place the tennis ball underneath the top of the calf muscle, just below the knee area. Using your arms and left foot to support you, roll over the tennis ball lengthwise so that the ball goes from just below the knee to just above the ankle. Repeat several times until you feel the tension in your calf release.

Tools can’t sense your muscles relaxing; only your hands can. When using any tool to self-massage, stop occasionally to check in with your hands and feel how your muscles are reacting.

Source: www.runnersworld.com