

Understanding the process of fascial unwinding.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Fascial or myofascial unwinding is a process in which a client undergoes a spontaneous reaction in response to the therapist's touch. It can be induced by using specific techniques that encourage a client's body to move into areas of ease. Unwinding is a popular technique in massage therapy, but its mechanism is not well understood. In the absence of a scientific explanation or hypothesis of the mechanism of action, it can be interpreted as "mystical."

PURPOSE: This paper proposes a model that builds on the neurobiologic, ideomotor action, and consciousness theories to explain the process and mechanism of fascial unwinding. **HYPOTHETICAL MODEL:** During fascial unwinding, the therapist stimulates mechanoreceptors in the fascia by applying gentle touch and stretching. Touch and stretching induce relaxation and activate the parasympathetic nervous system. They also activate the central nervous system, which is involved in the modulation of muscle tone as well as movement. As a result, the central nervous system is aroused and thereby responds by encouraging muscles to find an easier, or more relaxed, position and by introducing the ideomotor action. Although the ideomotor action is generated via normal voluntary motor control systems, it is altered and experienced as an involuntary response.

CONCLUSIONS: Fascial unwinding occurs when a physically induced suggestion by a therapist prompts ideomotor action that the client experiences as involuntary. This action is guided by the central nervous system, which produces continuous action until a state of ease is reached. Consequently, fascial unwinding can be thought of as a neurobiologic process employing the self-regulation dynamic system theory.