



# Self-Care Tips & Tools

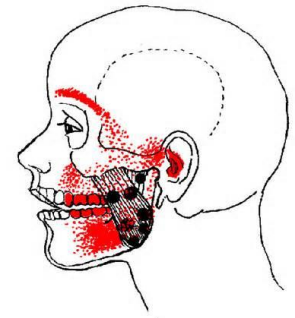
*Below are the self-care tools I most commonly recommend in my practice. As always, you should never perform an exercise, including any of these self-care tools, which causes you increased discomfort or which you've been advised not to perform in the past by your health care provider or during one of our sessions. If you experience discomfort, immediately stop the use of the self-care tool and contact me or your health care provider.*

## Intra-Oral Jaw Release

**Indications:** Waking with tension in the jaw; clenching or grinding teeth; difficulty fully opening jaw; jaw tenderness, which may include tenderness when chewing hard foods; headaches; neck ache; sinus congestion or pressure; tenderness, pain or stiffness at sacrum or pelvis; problems holding chiropractic adjustments at neck, upper ribs or pelvis; during pregnancy and early labor

**Directions:** Using your index finger: 1) Start with your finger pressing against the middle point of the very back of your hard palate (bump on the roof of the mouth). Stripe your finger along the muscle which runs from this middle point to the inside surface of your last molar on the top (follow the muscle tension—the end point may be above and slightly further back than this last upper molar). Repeat several times (10 or so) on this side, and then do the same amount of work on the opposite side. 2) Picking up where you left off at the inside of the last upper molar, stripe your finger down along this muscle to the inside surface of the last molar on the bottom. Again, repeat several times on this side, and then do the same on the opposite side. *Steps 1 and 2 can be combined into one long stroke, if you prefer.*

3) Starting with your finger on the outside of your last upper molar, turn your finger so that the pad faces your cheek. Now, push out against that pocket between your cheek and teeth while striping your finger down toward that last lower molar. Again, repeat several stripes before doing the same on the opposite side.



**Note:** ALWAYS complete the same work on the opposite side, despite the fact that one side may be much tighter than the other. Failure to do so can create an imbalance which impacts the entire spine and, subsequently, the entire body.

**Additional Tips:** Very uncomfortable and tender? Try starting with moist heat: Fill a wash basin with water as hot as you can stand along with ¼ cup of Epsom salts. Place a couple of washcloths in the water to soak. Wring one out and place it along the jaw line (from just beneath one ear, under the jaw, to just beneath the other ear). When that cloth begins to cool, pull out the other and repeat. May also be applied after the jaw release, though typically works best if used beforehand. If you have some ESSENTIAL THERAPY Betony-Lobelia Muscle Relief tincture handy, it may be applied externally to the jaw line, and you can also add some to water and swirl it around for a minute or so before swallowing. The direct contact with the muscles can help alleviate muscle spasm.

## Golf Ball at the Foot

**Indications:** Pain, tenderness or muscular tension in the foot, lower leg, thigh or hip; problems with hip alignment; tight iliotibial band; pain at the knee, or problems with knee alignment; fibula alignment issues; pain up one side of the back or in one shoulder more than the other; headaches on one side; long hours on feet (standing, walking, work, meal prep, travel, etc)

**Directions:** While seated, roll a golf ball around under the foot, ensuring that you work through the entire foot. Begin with 1 minute. May be increased to up to 5 minutes per foot.

**Follow up:** Once you have released the tension in the foot, you should ideally then retrain the muscles of the foot to properly support the arch in good alignment. For this portion of the exercise, either pick up a washcloth or marbles with your toes. You only need lift the foot an inch or two off the ground before dropping the item and repeating the exercise again. Repeat 10 times per side. (See picture on next page)



**Additional Tips:** Place a yoga mat (or shelf liner with similar texture) underneath the golf ball while performing this exercise to prevent it from rolling away too easily. When working through the outer edge of the foot, sit with that foot right next to the wall so that you may trap the ball between the edge of your foot and the wall. Once again, never underestimate the power of an Epsom salt soak! If the feet are very tender, tight, or swollen, soak them in a foot bath with at least ¼ cup Epsom salts for 15 minutes or so. Take your time when getting up from the foot soak to prevent lightheadedness.

## Tennis Ball under the Thigh

**Indications:** Discomfort at the knee; tight iliotibial band; discomfort at the hips; sitting for long periods (long flight or car ride, for example); low back discomfort

**Directions:** While seated (ideally on a firm surface), lean to one side far enough to allow you to position the tennis ball under the side of the thigh at about the level of the hip bone. Shift your weight back to the center, or even slightly to the side with the tennis ball, to press the ball into the muscle/IT band. Rock back toward the opposite side (without ball) and move the ball down about an inch on the leg. Continue to repeat the rocking action and press and release movement, working your way from the hip down to just above the knee. Alternately, you could begin with the ball at the knee and work your way up. You can also position the ball directly under the thigh (rather than under the side of the thigh) and then extend your knee as though you were going to kick the seat in front of you; this will provide a similar press and release for the hamstrings muscles. Be sure to repeat on the opposite side.

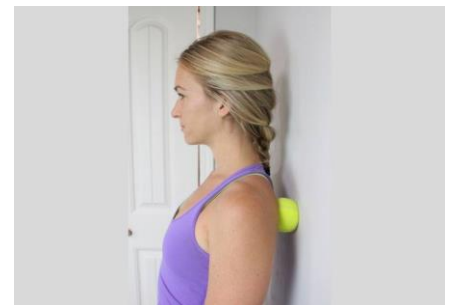
**Note:** Do not perform around an area of the thigh in which there is a varicose vein.

**Additional Tips:** When utilizing the tennis ball in a car or on a plane, first put the tennis ball in a tube sock and tie the end closed. Should you accidentally drop the ball, it is less likely to roll away from you and will be easier to retrieve.

## Tennis Ball at the Wall

**Indications:** Tension, discomfort at the neck, shoulders, back, hips; headaches; stomachache; imbalance at the hips; feeling “off” or out of alignment

**Directions:** Stand with your feet approximately one foot away from the wall. Place the tennis ball to one side of your spine and sandwich it between your back and the wall. Bend your knees, going into and out of a partial squat, to roll the tennis ball along the muscles on that side of the spine. After rolling through that area a few times, stop and move the ball up or down and repeat the rolling process. Be sure to do the same on the opposite side. **SHOULDERS:** Turn your body slightly to one side to trap the ball between your shoulder blade and the wall. Roll your shoulder just as you would to warm it up before exercise; this motion will roll the ball around on the shoulder blade quite well. Be cautious about pressing too hard or too long on the achy spots you are liable to find in the shoulder blades. It’s great to do some work like that, but keep it to a minimum—no more than one minute—or you will likely cause the trigger points to flare things up. You can always come back later in the day or the next day to do a little more, but there is no way to undo it when you’ve already done too much. **HIPS:** Center the ball at the base of the spine/top of the hips. Rock your hips from side to side (no longer up and down) to create a release through this region. Similar to the shoulders, you can turn slightly to one side and roll a bit more through one glut at a time.



**Note:** Never use the ball directly on the spine; work to one side or the other.

**Additional Tips:** If you find an area that is particularly tight, begin above or below that point and push your weight back against the wall for 3 to 6 seconds, then release. Repeat up to 6 times before moving to a different point. In a case like this, work *around* that point first before you work directly on it. Do not spend any more than 5 minutes *on the entire back* doing this type of focus work (and no more than 1-2 minutes in a general area), or you are liable to actually

flare things up. If things still feel tight, move out from that area. Don't forget, it can actually be an area on the other side of your body and the opposite end of the spine that is actually creating the discomfort. Don't get sucked into tunneling in on the spot that you think is causing the discomfort; often that is not the case. Work your way out until you find the culprit. When all else fails, take a long (20 minutes) Epsom salt soak with a generous amount of the salts (at least 2 cups). You can also use ESSENTIAL THERAPY Betony-Lobelia Muscle Relief topically and internally to help with the spasm.

## Milking Muscles

**Indications:** Muscular tension; achy muscle; feeling of compression or myofascial tightness; headache; tight or achy neck or shoulders; sense of fullness in arms; discomfort at wrists or hands; edema or swelling in fingers; repetitive tasks with hands or arms; long hours at computer, workstation, writing

**Directions:** Beginning at the wrist, use your opposite hand to squeeze and release the muscles, working your way up the arm. At the shoulder, reach across the top of the shoulder and squeeze and hold for a few seconds. Repeat on the other arm. Finish by reaching one hand around the back of the neck and squeezing for a few seconds. Most effective when repeated a few times a day, particularly if you are working at a computer workstation or performing repetitive tasks with your arms.



**Additional Tips:** This same type of squeeze and release milking of the muscle may be performed working up the calf and the thigh. NOTE: Do not perform over an area of the leg in which there is a varicose vein.

## Myofascial Chest Release

**Indications:** Headache; neck, shoulder or upper back tightness or discomfort; pain in the arms; numbness or tingling in the hands; tightness or discomfort in the jaw; recent changes in vision or hearing without other medical explanation; postural alignment issues: head and shoulders forward, too tight; long hours at a desk or computer; long flight or car ride; carrying heavy items; carrying children; in grief, when feeling "stuck" as though you're having a difficult time working through it, and also for the tension in the shoulders, neck and head associated with the grief; mastitis\*, plugged ducts; breastfeeding; post-breast surgery (when cleared for such work); edema\* in arms  
*\*Please follow-up with medical provider. Do not perform over a port, stint, or other implanted device.*



**Directions:** Without oil or lotion on the hands: 1) Use the pads (not tips) of the fingers and work in small circles along the collar bone from the notch above the breast bone out to the shoulder. Repeat on the opposite side. 2) Flatten the palm of the hand, and using more pressure through the heel of the hand, press across the chest, from the breast bone out toward the shoulder. Movement is *slow*, allowing the tissue time to slowly release under the tension you are creating. Make several passes in this fashion, ensuring that you cover as much of the chest as possible. For example, first pass might be up near the collar bone, then next begins a little further down on the breast bone, etc. Repeat on the opposite side. 3) Combined neck and chest stretch: First, use the flats of fingers or side of the hand underneath the collar bone to pull the tissue down toward the feet. Next, tilt your head toward the opposite shoulder. Performed correctly, you should feel this stretch extend up the front and side of the neck.

**Additional Tips:** CHEST HAIR: If chest hair is an issue, you can try performing this release by working on top of your t-shirt; there still may be some hair pulling, but it will be reduced. You can also place the heel of your hand and--without dragging it across the skin--press out to the side to try to achieve as much stretch as possible in that position; then, lift your hand and move it to the next spot further out to the side and repeat. BODY POSITION VARIATIONS: The fascial layers will shift as you change position from lying down to sitting to leaning forward. To gain the most benefit from this self-care tool, be sure to try the release in all of these positions. After practicing several times, you may find one position tends to provide the greatest relief consistently. EXPLORE MOVEMENT PATTERNS: In addition to trying the release in various body positions, also experiment with other movement patterns. For example: 1) Start with your body leaning forward and shoulder rounded forward. As you make your way across your chest with the heel of your hand, sit up tall while at the same time rolling the shoulder back and reaching your arm out to the side. 2) Reach your arm out

to the side. 3) Try rotating your arm (so hand is pointing up or down) with the arm out to the side. 4) Turn to look over one shoulder or the other, or up toward the ceiling. Exploring movements with the head will be particularly helpful if you notice the tension extends all the way up the neck or the jaw. 5) Use your breath to facilitate the release. Experiment with inhaling to help lift and expand the ribs while you move across. Also try exhaling and feel how the heel of the hand will sink even deeper into the tissue. Notice which provides the greatest relief and freedom of movement afterward. **RELEASE AROUND BREAST TISSUE:** As you work further down the breast bone, create an L-shape between your thumb and heel of your hand. Use the thumb to help “hook” around the breast tissue and release the fascia. It’s especially important for women to perform this release both while seated and while leaning forward, as you will notice a significant shift in the fascial planes and the degree of release achieved in each.

## Massage Scalp, Pull Hair & Ears

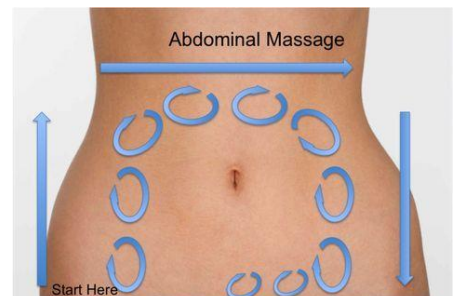
**Indications:** General tension or tightness along spine; headache; jaw ache or tightness; sensitivity to light or sound; tension or discomfort in head, neck, shoulders, back; long hours at workstation or in other stationary position (meeting, car, plane, etc); repetitive lifting or lifting something heavy, including care giving or child care; long hours on feet (meal prep, party, etc); pain in the arms; tightness in sacrum or hips

**Directions:** 1) Vigorously massage scalp to help to release muscles and fascia along cranium, which can then produce more slack along the spine to provide relief.  
2) Grab hold of a large chunk of hair at its roots and gently twist or pull to produce further release. **VARIATIONS:** Twist the hands into the hair and pull in opposite directions, toward each other, etc. Explore the movement to find the greatest release.  
3) Massage the ears, and then firmly grasp the ears near the head and slowly pull or traction away. Again, try varying the direction of pull. Hair and ears do not have to be pulled in the same direction. For example, you may find the greatest release when the left hand is pulling up and toward the back, while the right is pulling down and to the side.

## Clockface Abdominal Massage

**Indications:** GI upset (not including active infections such as the flu or food poisoning), including cramping; heartburn or acid reflux; menstrual difficulties or pain; scar tissue from abdominal surgeries or injections (when cleared for such work); back or hip pain; problems with hip alignment; knee pain or alignment problems; stress; constipation; IBS; sluggish digestion

**Directions:** Imagine a clockface on your abdomen, 12 where your ribs meet, 3 to your left side, 6 above your pubic bone, and 9 to your right side. Using gentle pressure and working the pads of the fingers in small circles, start on your lower right side (7 o’clock) and work your way up toward the base of the ribs (12 o’clock), across the abdomen to the left (3 o’clock), and then down the left toward the pubic bone (6 o’clock). Continue working in this fashion, making several passes—some closer to the navel and others further out—so that you cover as much of the abdomen as possible, from the navel all the way out to the sides, top and bottom.



**Note:** ALWAYS work in a CLOCKWISE direction, up on the right, across the top (near the base of your ribs) from right to left, then down on the left. Working in a counter-clockwise direction can disrupt the normal flow through the GI tract, resulting in constipation.

**Additional Tips:** If you find there is too much tension for you to work comfortably through the abdomen, try using a hot pack over the abdomen for 15 minutes first before beginning the massage. If you experience any tenderness afterward, be sure to use a lighter pressure next time. May be performed with oil or lotion on the skin, or may be performed over clothing. If scar tissue is an issue, remember you can use a castor oil pack along with the hot pack before beginning the massage (ask for directions).

**Should you have any questions regarding these self-care tools and tips, please contact Becky at 303-349-3835.** These indications and directions are meant to be brief descriptions and may not be complete; should you have any questions regarding the performance of or appropriateness of a self-care tool, please contact me before beginning its use. This information is for educational purposes only and is based on the opinions and beliefs of Becky Wyland, CH, CN, CSCS, CMT and ESSENTIAL THERAPY, LLC. It is not intended to diagnose, treat, prevent or cure any medical condition. Consult a health care professional before using any of these self-care tools during pregnancy, with infants or children, or if you have a serious health problem.