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Deep Tissue Massage and Myofascial Release: A Video guide to Techniques

By Art Riggs. Art Riggs Publishing, 2003;
510-482-2036;
[www.deeptissuemassage.com]
7 volumes, 11 hours, VHS or DVD

Reviewed by Lisa Mertz

Art Riggs is one of the most awesome bodywork teachers in our profession. He advocates a holistic approach, recommending that we don't just treat the site of an injury in a perfunctory way, but instead learn to express compassion for the psychological aspects of pain. A client in chronic pain might have lost confidence in the ability of the body to heal itself. Whether in a wellness massage or a clinical treatment, a nurturing touch, coupled with strategies for self-care, can reinvigorate an injured client's healing process. Riggs says it's the compassionate touch that separates us from the massage machines that are on the market, adding that you can tell if a massage is going to be good with the first two minutes just by the quality of the therapist's touch.

Riggs is a Certified Advanced Rolfer® and long-time massage therapy educator working in the San Francisco Bay area. This seven-volume video set is a companion to his book, *Deep Tissue Massage: A Visual Guide to Techniques* (reviewed in MTJ, Fall 2003). The material is advanced, so it's recommended for practicing therapists who already have a firm knowledge of anatomy. The set is sequential, and the information presented builds with increasing complexity, making it easier to learn.



There's enough material to create a 100 hour training course. Twenty-one slides of anatomy drawings from Travell and Simons' *Myofascial Pain and Dysfunction* are interspersed throughout the lecture/demonstrations. Riggs begins the videos with a carefully crafted presentation on the fundamentals of good practice, emphasizing palpation skills and biomechanics. He includes an extensive section on cautions and shows specific, gentle ways to work around certain endangerment sites, such as the anterior triangle of the neck. He also discusses reasons for totally avoiding other sites, such as the trigeminal nerve at the hinge of the jaw.

The demonstrations of strokes using proper biomechanics are truly brilliant. Riggs discusses which "tools" to use, "moving upstream" from the fingers to the knuckles, to the forearm and finally to the elbow. He shows how to do deep work on specific muscles without compromising your wrists or using your thumbs.

Rather than taking the cookbook approach—offering recipes for various conditions—Riggs teaches how to focus on what you want to accomplish with an individual client's body. He shows how to use precise, intentional strokes for specific purposes. Applying an Esalen-style gliding stroke along the direction of the muscle fiber lengthens tissue. Riggs demonstrates how to grab and stretch the tissue, rather than simply gliding over it. He also shows joint decompression and facilitating shortening, as well as a way of applying facilitated lengthening he calls "anchor and stretch."

The teachings culminate in strategies for troubleshooting specific conditions, like hip replacement, tennis elbow and whiplash. Again, Riggs does not simply present routines or protocols, but rather treatment options drawn from precise anatomical knowledge, applying specific intentional strokes with some intuition on the side.

Deep Tissue Massage is a beautifully produced video set, and the demonstrations are presented without obstruction. Riggs' passion for the profession really shines through his on-camera presence. He is a great teacher and he shares an enormous amount of knowledge and wisdom on these videos.