

# TENNIS-BALL THERAPY

While a nice, deep-tissue massage usually takes care of trigger points and muscle aches, it's a sad reality that few folks can afford to go to a massage therapist every time a trigger point causes tightness.

Tennis-Ball Therapy is an inexpensive solution: trigger-point self-massage with a tennis ball. Just ask a tennis-playing friend for a reject; a used tennis ball is best as it has more give, or use a dryer ball, or the right size rubber ball.

Only a few days into the therapy, you will find any number of issues in your body disappearing. When using the ball therapy on the bottom of the foot, the most common testimonial I hear is that it makes those annoying leg cramps that wake some of us in the middle of the night go away. I personally have not been awakened by those crippling cramps in my shins since I started this therapy in August 2008. If you have any kind of foot problems such as bunions, bone spurs, corns, etc. take 10 minutes each day for this foot therapy and witness the miracles. Massage it out with a ball before it manifests into a bigger problem. A bunion is an all-too-common foot problem that can easily develop into a painful deformity if left unchecked. Medical science treats bunions as a progressive disorder and cites hereditary factors as the main culprit. But from a more holistic perspective, constrictive shoes, coupled with the fact that we rarely stretch, massage, or otherwise properly exercise our feet, are also contributing factors. A little ball therapy along with attention to our feet in our yoga postures can slow the progression of bunions caused by hereditary factors, and even halt the formation of bunions resulting from neglect and ill-fitting shoes. Even if you don't have bunions, this therapy will help reduce soreness and fatigue, and keep your feet healthy and strong.



**The Four Corners** of the foot are like tires on a car. Much like the wear and tear caused by misalignment of the tires, the feet get worn and sore as bunions develop.

**Anatomy of a bunion:** If the metatarsal or cuneiform bones are shaped unusually, the metatarsal tends to shift outward. When the adductor hallucis gets tight, it pulls the phalange of the big toe inward and the abductor ballucis becomes overstretched.

The ball therapy also can help relieve the low-back tightness associated with menstrual cramps, scoliosis and pregnancy. Post-exercise is another practical application. Runners, weight lifters and other athletes often experience low-back tightness after a heavy workout, and the tennis ball, when properly applied, can help. Men can also irritate their gluteal muscles simply by sitting for too long on a thick wallet.

So many people live with these trigger-point pains. We tend to ignore them or just attribute them to bad posture or age or being overweight. But they're not normal and they need to be dealt with. This self-administered therapy is not meant for injured, inflamed or acutely-painful muscles. Those might be better treated with an ice pack or a doctor visit. It can be effective, however, in bringing blood to an irritated area to loosen up tight muscles.

## DOS AND DON'TS OF TENNIS-BALL THERAPY

- Never put the ball directly on the spine or any bone.
- Avoid the neck area.
- If you feel a shooting pain, stop. A deep massage over the ball is OK, but sharp pain is not.
- If you feel any numbness or tingling in your legs or arms, reposition the ball and breath deep into the area, as you may have placed it on a nerve.
- If you apply the ball to one side, balance it out by applying equal pressure, for the same amount of time, to the opposite side.
- Breathe deep and always let the exhalation last longer than the inhalation. Become the witness of the body relaxing with each exhalation.
- If you prefer to use harder balls, be careful not to bruise the tissue and further irritate the area.

It's important to lie on a carpeted floor or an exercise mat in a warm area. Cold drafts can aggravate trigger points. When dressing, try to avoid bulky seams that may irritate the skin. The technique is simple. You will probably need to increase or decrease the pressure by slowly and gradually rolling around on the ball to find the exact spot. A deep massage is what you're after. However, if a trigger point becomes more painful or the ball causes you to tighten your muscles because of increased discomfort, ease off that spot. Once you find the trigger point, hold the position for at least three deep breaths, then ease off. Repeat until the trigger point is released and pain decreases or disappears. After putting pressure on one side, try lying still for a few seconds or minutes to feel how the worked side has improved before placing the ball on the other side.

# BALL THERAPY FOR THE FEET

Tennis-ball trigger-point therapy can be helpful for aching feet. It can promote circulation and flexibility in those hard-working extremities. There are over 70,000 nerve endings in the bottom of our feet and lots of pressure points connecting to every organ in our bodies. (See the Pressure Point Chart at the bottom of the page.)

To practice the ball therapy from a standing position, bring the right foot forward on your mat and bend the knee. Relax the jaw, shoulders, neck and let the relaxation flow through the entire body. Let the exhalation be twice as long as the inhalation as the exhale is a natural tranquilizer for the body. Observe how the body lets go of tension as you exhale.

## The Heel

- Place the ball under the inside edge of the heel, keeping the knee bent and bring the weight of the torso over the ball applying pressure on the edge of the heel. Take a deep breath in and a long breath out, letting go.
- Move the ball to the outside edge of the heel and take another deep breath.
- Move the ball to the front center edge of the heel, bear down and breathe deep.

## The Arch (Instep)

- Move the ball somewhere in the center of the sole of the foot. Make sure the skin on your face is soft with a smile and check in with your jaw to make sure it is relaxed. Press into the ball as you take a deep breath, remembering to exhale a long time and observe the muscles on the bottom of the foot letting go as you exhale.
- With each new inhale, move the ball to another space, letting your intuition guide you. If you find a spot that needs special attention, take a couple of deep breaths relaxing the adductor hallucis muscle at the bottom of your foot allowing the ball to go deep into the myofascial, the most important connective tissue.

## The Toe Bed (Ball of the Foot)

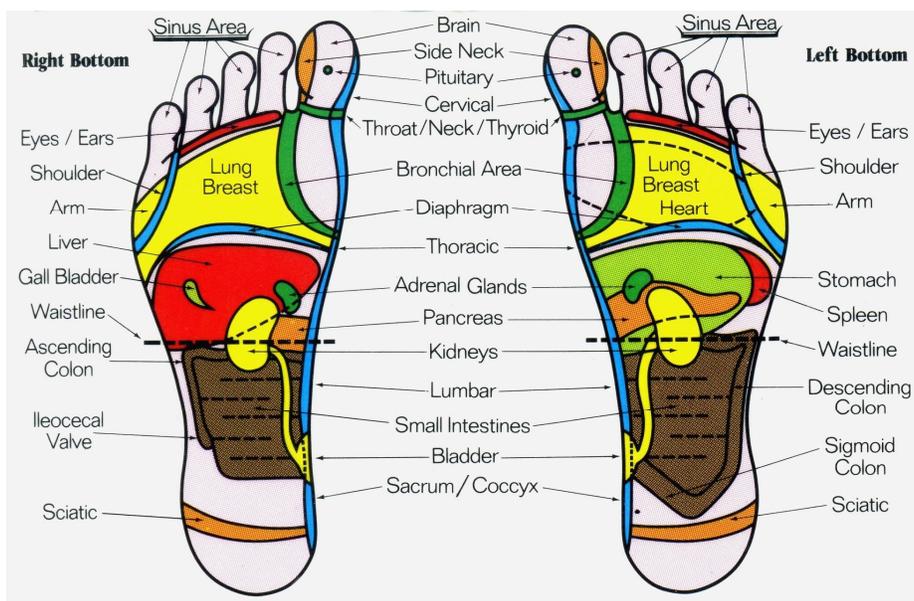
- Place the ball between the first two bones on either side of the foot. Lift the toes and spread them wide to separate the bones in the toe bed. Weight down over the ball and breathe deep.
- With each new inhale, move the ball between the next two bones, keeping the toes spread to keep the space between the bones. With each new breath, move the ball until you have massaged between each of the bones in the ball of the foot.

## The Toes

- Place the ball under the toes with the toe mound (ball of the foot) pressed into the floor. Bend the knee forward until it extends over the toes and let the toes spread wide apart and stretch back circulating the prana everywhere. Breathe deep.
- With each new inhalation, move the ball between the next two toes, stretching from the tip of the toe to the base, activating the circulation in the feet.

When you are finished with the right foot, stand for a moment with the feet hips width apart, close the eyes and feel the connection you've made with the rest of the body. Now bring the left foot forward repeating the above.

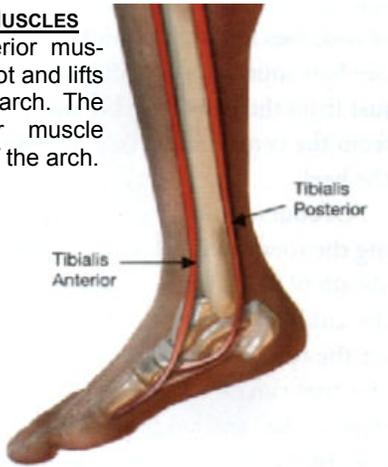
If there is irritation in the ball of the foot, step on the ball and curl the toes as far as possible over the ball. For aching arches, simply stand with feet shoulder-width apart and step on the ball, rolling it around until you find the toughest spot, then put all your weight onto it. Don't forget to breathe deeply. The heel can also be a sore point. A sore heel often is a symptom of a heel spur. It could be aggravated with any pressure. Try applying pressure to one foot, then standing firm on both feet to compare. You will probably find that the worked foot feels more flexible and connected to the floor. Tennis-ball massage is most effective when followed up with gentle stretching. It often has the added benefit of increasing range of motion and making your yoga practice more effective.



# FOOT STRETCHES AND MASSAGE

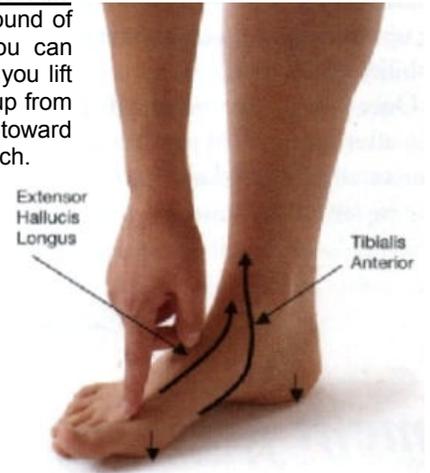
## THE TIBIALIS MUSCLES

The tibialis anterior muscle inverts the foot and lifts the front of the arch. The tibialis posterior muscle lifts the middle of the arch.



## ACTIVATING THE TIBIALIS ANTERIOR

Keep your heel and the mound of your big toe grounded (you can use your finger to help) as you lift your big toe. Draw energy up from below the big toe mound toward your ankle to activate the arch.



## LITTLE TOE EXERCISE

To strengthen your outer ankle, raise all your toes, then extend only your little toe out and down to the floor.



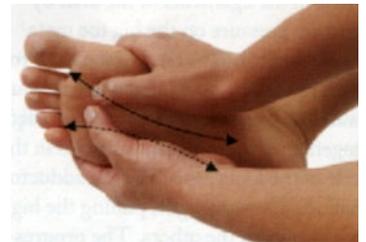
## ADVANCED TOW EXERCISE

Keeping the middle toes lifted and spread, extend your big and little toes out and down to the floor.



## YOGA HANDSHAKE

To create more space between your toes, cup the sole of your foot with the palm of your hand and interlace your fingers between your toes.

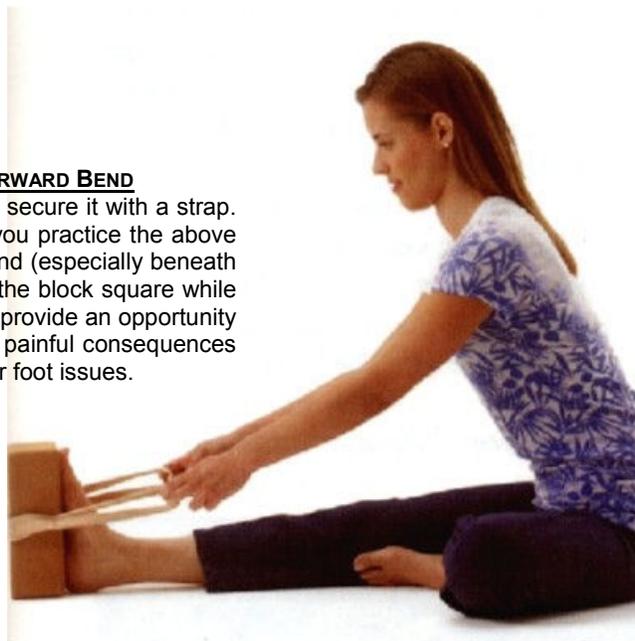


## FOOT MASSAGE

Start at the base of your toes and massage down through the inner arch to release the adductor muscles.

## JANUSHIRSHASANA—SEATED FORWARD BEND

Place a block at the sole of your foot and secure it with a strap. Be sure to keep the block square while you practice the above toe exercises. Press through the toe mound (especially beneath your big toe) and into the block, keeping the block square while working your toes. Seated forward bends provide an opportunity to work the feet without experiencing the painful consequences of bearing weight on a bunion or any other foot issues.



## BALL THERAPY FOR THE LEGS AND GLUTS

Tennis-ball therapy brings a fresh flow of prana to the legs and buttocks, revitalizing and regenerating the cells. It can promote circulation and flexibility in those hard-working extremities.

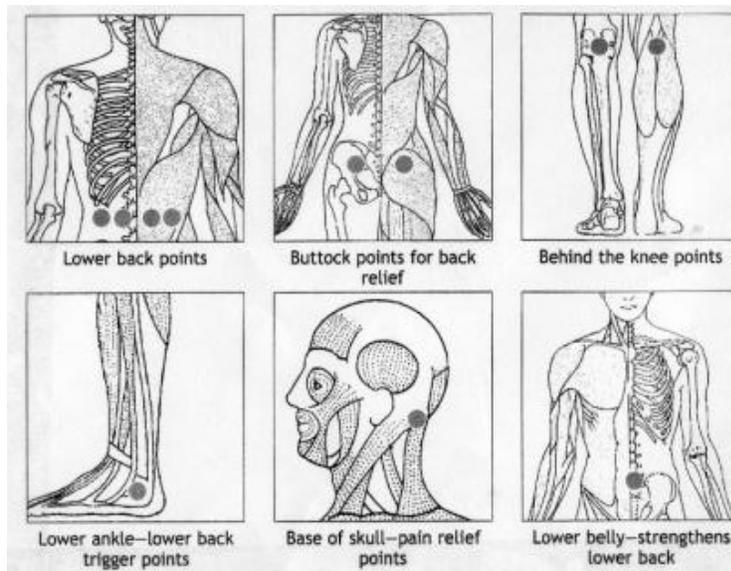
To practice the ball therapy, sit on your mat with your right leg extended in front of you, bending the left knee and bringing the heel as close into the buttocks as you can. Place the sole of the left foot on the floor towards the outside edge of your mat. Support yourself by placing the palms of the hands on the floor next to the hips.

### The Calves

- Place the ball under the lowest part of your calf. Lift the torso to shift the weight of the body onto the ball by pushing the hands into the floor. Feel the weight of the leg on the ball deeply massaging.
- Once again, relax the jaw, shoulders, neck and become the observer of the body relaxing with the lengthy exhalation. Observe how the body softens the muscles in the calves as you exhale.
- With every new inhale, move the ball to a new part of your calves, giving attention where the body is asking for it.

### The Back of the Knee

- Move the ball underneath the knee, placing it in the center. Place your left foot on top of your thigh to allow the ball to get deep into the connective tissue. Take a few deep breaths with lengthy exhalations.
- This is one of the six pressure points used for back pain. See chart below for the location of all six of these points.



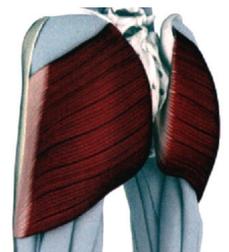
### The Hamstrings

- Move the ball underneath the hamstrings, bear down and roll the ball from side to side over the thick tissue on the inside back of the thigh. Breathe deep and lengthen your exhale.
- With each new inhale, move the ball upward, either zigzagging as you breathe or moving the ball with your hand.
- Once again, if you find a spot that needs special attention, take a couple of deep breaths in that area directing the prana and allowing the healing to take place.



### The Gluteus Maximus

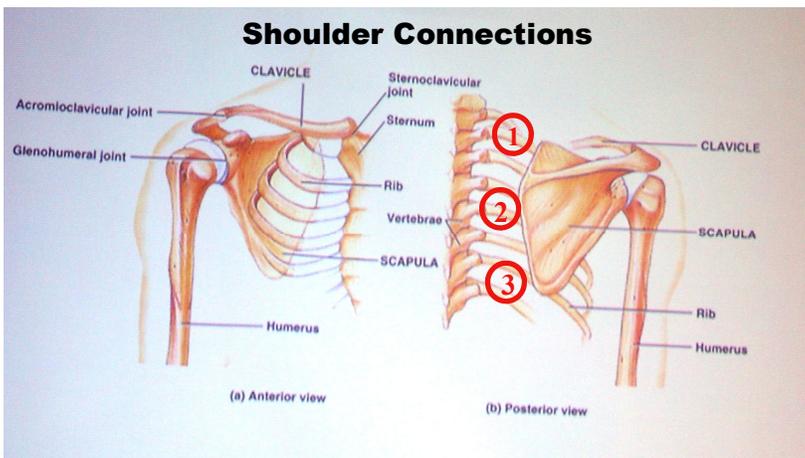
- Lift the hip and place the ball under and in the center of the gluteus maximus. Lower the hip back down, sitting on the ball, lifting the opposite hip off the floor to bring all your weight onto the ball, circulating the prana everywhere. Check in with the jaw and the rest of the body, surrendering into relaxation. Keep the face soft and breath deep.
- With each new inhalation, slightly move the ball massaging deep into the Iliopsoas Muscle.
- Massaging deep into the glutes can improve posture, ease back pain, and strengthen your stride.



## BALL THERAPY FOR THE SHOULDERS

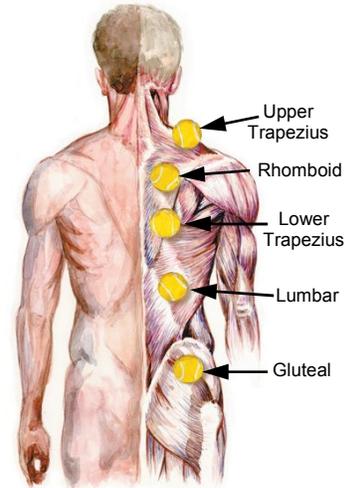
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To practice the ball therapy, lie on your mat with both knees bent and the soles of the feet comfortably on the floor. Support your head with the palm of your left hand. Use the figure below to determine where the three positions of the ball should be.



Get help for these five areas →

These are just five of the common problem areas that can benefit from tennis-ball trigger-point therapy. Pressure can be applied while lying down on the balls in these five areas using deep three-part breathing.



### The Upper Edge of the Shoulder Blade, Position 1

- Place the ball in your right hand and press the right shoulder into the floor so you can determine the edge of the shoulder blade. Lift the right shoulder up and place the ball between the shoulder blade and the spine in the fleshy part. Take a deep breath, and let the jaw and shoulders relax. Bring the arm onto the mat next to the body with the palm on the floor. Take three deep breaths and as you exhale, allow the weight of the right shoulder to drop into the earth around the ball, going deep into the connective tissue.
- Mindfully, bring the arm straight out from the shoulders in a "T" with the palm facing up and take three more deep breaths. Turn the palm toward the earth and breathe.
- Moving cautiously, bring the arm above the head, creating your own modification if need be (½ cactus arm). Breathe three deep breaths.

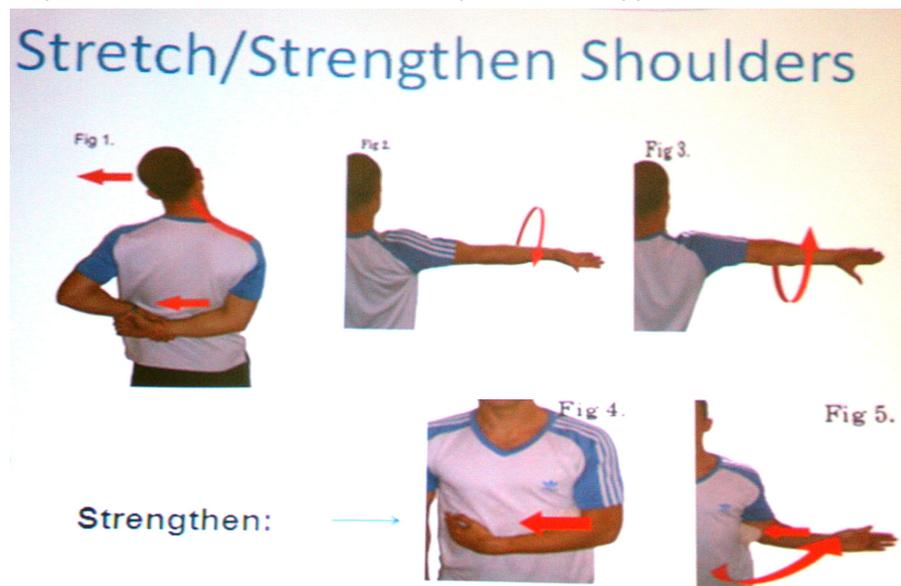
### The Middle Edge of the Shoulder Blade, Position 2

- While the arm is still above the head, lift the right shoulder again and reposition the ball to the well between the middle edge of your shoulder blade and the spine as shown on the #2 position on the figure above.
- Take three deep breaths in each of the four to five arm positions as described in Position 1 above.

### The Lower Edge of the Shoulder Blade, Position 3

- Move the ball to that juicy well between the lower edge of the shoulder blade and the spine, Position #3, and breathe three deep breaths.
- Take three deep breaths in each of the four to five arm positions as described in Position 1 above.
- Once again, if you find a spot that needs special attention, stay in that area and breathe even deeper.

Roll the ball up that well to the top of the shoulder. Remove it and repeat on the opposite side.



The following movements are suggested to stretch and strengthen the shoulders: