

Fascial fitness. Practical exercises to stay flexible, active, and pain-free in just 20 minutes a week

By Robert Schleip with Johanna Bayer



REVIEW BY EMMA GILMORE

I have followed Robert Schleip's work for many years, he is an inspiration and an expert on all things fascia, committed to sharing his practical knowledge and understanding of fascia in a truly accessible way.

This book is no different. He writes in a clear accessible style, for both manual therapists and movement teachers of any modality, as well as for the client. As a researcher and Bodywork practitioner he effectively brings together the two worlds of science and practical knowledge. My particular interest lies in Fascia Informed Bodywork, for physical, emotional, and mental health. When fascial work is applied with practitioner presence, and a safe holding field, our story - held in our physiology can begin to unfold. Our emotional and mental state, which of course are intrinsically linked to our physical body can take up the offer of change, this too is briefly mentioned in the book.

Initially, Schleip writes about fascia, introducing the reader to the amazing, dynamic fascial system - our connective tissue. This soft tissue runs through our entirety, surrounding our organs, giving us shape and structure. He talks about the importance of fascia for each and every one of us, as well as in athletic performance. He emphasises the fact that we must move away from the focus on individual muscles, nerves and bones and bring our attention to the fascia to understand chronic injuries and chronic pain. The fascial system is now credited with being our most important sensory organ. The connective tissue sends out signals to the brain the very heart of our consciousness all our body movements are determined by senses in the fascia, if they fail people can no longer control their movements.

The focus of fascial training is to optimise performance and allow you to achieve a new personal best, as well as to alleviate pain and stiffness in everyday life. Above all fascial training is easy to incorporate into your existing training schedule and it will complement and enrich existing training programs by adding in an important missing element. Fascia training is the final piece of the jigsaw with your personal program will prevent injury, increase stamina, keep you looking youthful and toned - so what's not to like? By training for just 10 minutes twice a week you can make a difference says Schleip.

Below is a list of some of the benefits of fascial training - listed by Schleip:

- ◆ Muscles work more efficiently
- ◆ Recovery time is shorter
- ◆ Performance increases
- ◆ Movement and coordination improve
- ◆ Movements appear more elegant
- ◆ Posture improves
- ◆ Body appears more toned and youthful
- ◆ Improves the condition of your fascia
- ◆ Provides long-term protection against pain and injury
- ◆ More fun and variety in your training
- ◆ Training gives you a sense of youth and vitality

After describing fascia as the building blocks of life, Schleip explains the components that make up fascia. The fibrous proteins of collagen and elastin are produced by cells, the fibroblasts. However, it is the extracellular MATRIX that makes up the majority of fascia. The matrix is a mixture of fibres and ground substances. The fluid element of the ground substance consists of water and sugar molecules whose job it is to bind various materials and cells together. The matrix plays a crucial role in supplying nutrients to connective tissue cells, and to the organ to which the connective tissue belongs. The matrix Hosts large quantities of immune cells, lymphocytes or fat cells, nerve endings and blood vessels. The water content of the matrix varies depending upon its location. Water is crucial as a medium for cellular metabolism. Consequently, the various techniques used to treat fascia focus on water content and the exchange of fluid, to improve function and performance.

Schleip lists the 4 basic functions of fascia as:

- ◆ Shape
- ◆ Movement
- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Supply

For each of the 4 functions of fascia, Schleip has developed a full programme of fascia specific exercise and stretch techniques - recommended to optimise the health and function of fascia. These four dimensions of fascial training have also shown to have positive effects on clients psychological and emotional wellbeing. This is explained in more detail below (in the stretch and feel sections).

Schleip describes the four functions of fascia & four dimensions of training in more detail:

To understand how the four dimensions of training affect fascia read on....

1. **Stretch - basic function: shape.** Stimulates the mechanical qualities of fascia as a substance that gives the body shape. It is a natural form of strain that is applied in many kinds of movement, conventional stretching will activate the long