



# Massage Therapists Guide for Heptathlons

by Susan Findlay

Every discipline has its sport related injuries. As discussed in previous issues, triathletes have a variety of injuries that are sport specific. Swimming will predominantly have issues with the shoulders and back, cycling typically will be knees, hip and wrists, while running has a multitude of conditions with legs and ankles. As can be seen from the biomechanics, injuries are more likely to be related to the stresses and demands that are specific to the sport.

The main difference between triathlons and heptathlons is, triathlons have three events over a one day period, while a heptathlon consists of seven events over a two day period. An athlete

competing in a heptathlon will usually have a wider range of injuries, and possibly a higher incidence of them. This coincides with the increased demands made on the body.

Heptathlons are designed for women only and they include: a high jump, long jump, shot put, javelin, hurdles, a sprinting run and a distance run. Female heptathletes are amongst the most talented women in athletics as they must be incredibly strong, have a tremendous amount of skill in a wide range of sporting events and be extremely motivated.

They often start training very young, and in the early years the main concentration will be in developing the

core skills and technique rather than trying to focus on hard exercise. This makes for a stronger foundation from which a heptathlete can build on, thus ensuring they have the necessary skills to move to the heavier training levels.

Failure to do the groundwork will lead to injuries, and if the athlete does not train systematically at the various stages, but tries to push too much too soon they will plateau, and not be able to progress, as well as sustain injuries. As a sport & remedial massage therapist we look for these situations. If an athlete comes in with regular minor injuries, it is important to question whether they are following a prescribed training program.

# sportsmassage

massage for heptathlons

## Heptathlon (for women only)

### 7 events

200 meter sprint  
800 meter run  
100 meter hurdles  
long jump  
shot put  
javelin  
high jump

## Decathlon (for men & women)

### 10 events

100 meter sprint  
400 meter sprint  
1,500 meter run  
110 meter hurdles  
discus throw  
javelin throw  
shot put  
pole vault  
high jump  
long jump

Sometimes, the athlete will do extra training without telling their coach and the type and amount of training could be wrong for what the intended need is.

It is also important to keep the communication open and work together with all members of a training team. Not only for situations like the above, but if the athlete is consulting with a variety of people to enhance her training, yet they are not communicating with one another, they could be working at crossed purposes, which has the potential to be counterproductive and hinder the desired outcome.



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It would be difficult to discuss all the common injuries that a heptathlete could face. Since in previous issues we have covered conditions related to running, cycling and swimming, I will take the opportunity to deal with a specific injury that is a common to javelin throwers.

## Tendinitis of the long head of biceps

### What causes is?

The tendon and its sheath can be damaged by poor shoulder mechanics as well as an overuse syndrome of chronic wear and tear, due to excessive overhead motions such as throwing and lifting.

## Signs & Symptoms

Pain that is felt anterior to the shoulder, it can radiate to the elbow. There may be a clicking or popping sound in the shoulder with movement. There is evidence of pain with an overhead action.

## Treatment

The first step is to assess the range of motion (ROM), assess for weak rotators, check for functionality of the glenohumeral joint. Check for postural imbalances such as kyphosis in the upper thoracic region. Feel for which muscles are strong, weak, short and long. When massaging and changing tissue tension, it is important to lengthen tight muscles before you start strengthening the weaker ones. There needs to be a balance between

flexibility and stability, so it is vital not to loosen tight muscles too quickly without initiating the proprioceptive properties back into the weaker ones at an equal rate. At this point, if they are not already working with other bodyworkers, it is good to suggest such therapies such as pilates, physiotherapy, a personal trainer, nutritionist etc. to take the rehabilitation further.

## Conclusion

Heptathletes are often plagued with frequent injuries, simply because of the demands being made on their bodies is so varied and intense. As a therapist there is a great deal to consider, and certainly having such a demanding and complex combination of events, does require a wide range of knowledge and experience. It is important to assess each condition individually and then as a whole, to determine the interrelationships. Work with other professionals, obviously it is about the client, and their performance, and working together will maximize the effectiveness of the soft tissue work.

### Denise Lewis Heptathlon Olympic Champion

1996 – Olympic Games Atlanta – Bronze medal

1997 – World Championships – Athens – Silver medal

1998 – European Championships – Budapest – Gold medal

1998 – Commonwealth Games – Kuala Lumpur – Gold medal

1999 – World Championships – Seville – Silver medal. Underwent a calf operation following these championships. Right shoulder injury

2000 – Olympic Games Sydney – Gold medal. Achilles injury

2004 – Olympic Games Athens Pulled out – injured

June 2005 – Retires. "There comes a point when you have to take stock and I just did not want to be in pain anymore," she said.