

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS INJURIES: Treatment Options and How Manual Osteopathic Treatments Can Benefit The Fighter

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Sports injuries happen everyday at the recreation level and professional level. One of the fastest growing sports in the world today is Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). The events take place inside a caged ring or boxing ring. What makes this sport entertaining is the blend of disciplines the fighters must train in to become proficient in the sport. The main styles for mixed martial arts come from Muay Thai, western boxing, wrestling, and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. These disciplines enable the fighter to be trained in all aspects of the fight game: striking, kicking, wrestling or grappling.

Although the sport has an excellent track record of safety, there are always injuries during competition and training. These injuries can range from strikes to all areas of the body except the groin or joint submission locks being applied to the shoulder, elbow, knees, and neck. The most common injuries are often small cuts to the skin or bruises to the soft tissue such as cauliflower ear. It is rare to see serious injuries due to the fact fighters can tap out before serious injury occurs during a submission such as an arm lock. As well, professional referees are trained to stop the fight when one of the fighters is unable to defend themselves.

From my experience as a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu instructor and MMA coach, most injuries occur during training. Due to the constant drilling of techniques and the amount of repetitive application of techniques during training, there are many injuries such as pulled muscles, joint pain, and soft tissue injuries. Most injuries MMA and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu fighters are occur in the shoulders, neck, elbow, and knees. The repetitive stress placed on the lower back and neck during grappling sessions often lead to compression of nerves. I've seen many fighters with lower back issues such as sciatica, or stingers (pinched nerve) in the neck.

I've experienced quite a few injuries during my years of training in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu such as stingers, hyper extended knees and ankles. The list goes on and on. Fortunately, I have avoided any injuries which require surgery.

The question now is why do these injuries occur during training on the recreational level and profession level? This can be due in part to the culture of mixed martial arts which breeds a "bravado" or warrior culture. In many cases, ego is involved and many who train in the sport choose not to tap out during training. Combine this stubbornness with an egotistical training partner and you often end up with a injury due to your pride. As I say to all my students "tap early to train another day."

Another problem with recurring injuries in MMA is attributed to the refusal of these sports professionals to take time out to rest when it is needed. Often they

continue to train through injuries to avoid missing out on a paycheck or missing their opportunity to fight in a big show.

It's no wonder why the health professional is the MMA fighter's best friend. I'm going to outline some effective osteopathic treatment that can help professional and recreational MMA individuals rebound from their injuries and prevent re-injury from occurring.

The first option – and most cost efficient - is always self-treatment. An always tried and true method is the RICE treatment which stands for:

Rest

Ice

Compression

Elevation.

Many professional fighters now use a post workout ice bath. This involves filling up a tub of cold water with bags of ice and soaking in for 10 minutes after a hard workout. Its goal is to reduce inflammation and speed the muscle recovery process. This allows the fighter to get back to training by reducing muscle soreness.

If the injuries require the assistance of a health professional, there are many options out there such as sports doctors, chiropractors, physiotherapists, registered massage therapists, osteopaths, and alternative therapies. This can lead to mass confusion on which practitioner to select when dealing with an injury.

I will briefly outline what each of these practitioners offers and who to turn to when pondering decisions on which treatment is the best for the condition for an injured MMA individual.

General Doctors are the “jack of all trades”. They can be found at your nearby walk in clinic. Most of the time they handle general problems such as common colds, or deciding whether or not a problem needs to be referred to a specialist. They often prescribe medication and are the first line of defense. They can offer advice on non-serious injuries such as a dislocated finger. However, due to their generalist body of knowledge, their understanding of sports related injuries is limited in scope.

Chiropractors treat problems with bones, joints, and muscles using manipulation and adjustments to the body, mainly focused on the spine. By doing, this they improve the efficiency of your nervous to help you body heal itself.

Physiotherapists evaluate, restore, and maintain physical function for their patients. They have a thorough understanding of how the body functions and are trained to evaluate and improve movement and function to relieve pain. They promote a healthy lifestyle by teaching their patients to improve by taking control of their own lives.

For the MMA fighter, physiotherapists can help:

- prevent and treat sports injuries,
- restore and increase range of motion,
- provide a post-injury rehabilitation program,
- help fighters return to their training more quickly.

Physiotherapists administer treatment through a variety of ways such as massage, manipulation, electro-physical devices such as ultra sound, traction, or TENS machine.

The physiotherapy treatment can be beneficial as they have extensive training as well as a deep understanding of sports injuries. However, some physiotherapists and fighters will agree that they at times they rely too much on electronic machinery to treat their patients. This means a less hands on approach requiring massage or manipulation.

Registered massage therapists use different stroking and kneading techniques to relax the muscles. Receiving regular sports massage can help remove toxins, release tension and lactic acid build up thereby allowing the fighter train with less muscle soreness.

While massage is beneficial for non-serious injuries such as stiff muscles, on its own it has limitations as a stand alone treatment.

There are also alternative treatments which many fighters and athletes are looking to help aid their recovery from injuries. These treatments include:

- Acupuncture whereby the practitioner inserts needles into the meridian points in the body to release the stagnant qi energy. The belief is this will stimulate the body to heal itself from pain and disease.
- Rolfing manipulates the body's connective tissue called fascia to allow the body to move more freely and improve posture. Although many famous

- sports celebrities such as Kobe Bryant use Rolfing there is no scientific evidence that it actually works.
- - structural integration

The final treatment option I will be discussing is Manual Osteopathy and its role in the treatment of MMA injuries. Manual osteopathy has been around since 1874 and was created by Dr. Andrew T. Still. He believed that a doctor's role to fight disease was to restore the body's musculoskeletal system.

A manual osteopath uses joint mobilization and massage techniques on the joints and muscles to treat the patient. Their focus is on the patient as a whole rather than the disease itself.

MMA fighters experience a wide range of injuries and ailments that can be treated by a manual osteopath:

- Sprained joints ankles, knees, fingers, wrists, and shoulders due to joint locks used in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and catch wrestling.
- Pinched nerve in the neck commonly referred as a stinger or burner usually resulting from improper form during wrestling takedowns.
- Pulled muscles such as hamstrings, rotator cuff, and groin from high kicks to the body and hand strikes.
- Repetitive use injuries such as the hips and toes from constant maneuvering around the mat during grappling, and always staying on the toes during kickboxing.
- Knee pain and elbow pain due to hyperextension from knee bars and arm bars.
- Chronic neck and back neck injuries as a result of being slammed to the mat or pushed up against the fence.
- Slipped disc or bulging discs due to wear and tear from hard training.

From my experience, there are many fighters who train regularly without injury then all of a sudden wake up in the morning with pain in their neck, hip, or shoulders.

Due to the daily and regular strenuous workouts, MMA fighters eventually develop injuries or a chronic disease such as arthritis. As a manual osteopath, one can teach the MMA fighters how to improve posture and balance through exercise and stretches. By having them adopt a prehab mentality, they will not only improve their performance but also minimize their risk of long term injuries.

Although manual osteopaths can be generalist and treat a variety of musculoskeletal injuries, it's always best to find one who specializes in sports injuries. It's a bonus if you can find a hybrid osteopath who specializes in your chosen sport - in my case its mixed martial arts. Why is this important? Because they will understand how the injury occurred and the techniques applied that resulted in the injury.

From my experience in dealing with my own injuries, I grew increasingly frustrated jumping from doctor to doctor, physiotherapist to massage therapist and in the end not finding a solution to my injury. I often get a blank stare from the general practice doctor trying to explain to them I got a stinger from doing a double leg takedown.

Manual osteopaths can also recommend nutritional advice to enhance an athlete's overall performance and recovery. The nutritional advice can include what to eat prior to workouts, post workout, and what to eat leading up to the competition.

There are also muscle energy techniques that can be used to increase the fighter's quickness. One of the techniques is called Sports Muscle Energy technique which was created by Dr. Pourgol, an osteopath and chiropractor. This is very effective for athletes especially MMA fighters as Dr. Pourgal was once a national martial arts champion.

While the profession of manual osteopathy is new in Canada, it is becoming a more popular and widely accepted form of treatment for athletes. When seeking a manual osteopath, ensure the practitioner has attended a reputable school and passed their board exams. One of the main licensing bodies is the International Osteopathic Association.

Injuries in the MMA arena can be minor or serious. It is important to seek out a professional who can help treat these injuries. Always make sure before you book an appointment with a manual osteopath or health professional that he or she belongs to a national or international governing body.