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Practice Forum

A novel treatment tool to address soft tissue dysfunction

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These authors describe how they use thermoplastic materials to augment home exercise programs for clients with chronic and post-surgical soft tissue dysfunction. They discuss how after thorough education is provided, this alternative tool may be given for patient use. —Victoria Prigang, PhD, OTR, CHT, CLT, Practice Forum Editor.

Introduction

Instrument assisted soft tissue mobilization (IASTM) is a popular technique used to relieve musculoskeletal dysfunction. Born from eastern medicine, Gua-Sha is the predecessor of modern techniques such as Graston, Augmented Soft Tissue Mobilization, and HawkGrips.[1] These techniques use instruments fabricated from materials such as acrylic, plastic, and stainless steel to treat soft tissue restrictions contributing to musculoskeletal dysfunction.[1–3] There is evidence in the literature to support the effectiveness of this technique to help alleviate soft tissue restrictions causing dysfunction.[4,5] There is also evidence to support the use of these instruments to reduce hand pain and fatigue in therapists caused by performing manual soft tissue mobilization.[6] However, there is a significant cost to these instruments, which may preclude therapists from purchasing them.

The following is a novel, low cost alternative instrument that can be fabricated out of extra thermoplastic material found at any hand therapy clinic. It can be used by the therapist to assist with various soft tissue restrictions in chronic and post-surgical conditions, and given to patients for use with a home program following reflective clinical reasoning, instruction and training.

Materials

1. 2″ × 6″ × 1/8″ thickness, rigid thermoplastic material
2. Splint pan
3. Scissors
4. Pen or Pencil

Fig. 1. A. Dotted line across 2″ × 6″thermoplast. B. 2″ × 6″ thermoplast folded into 1″ × 6″ across the dotted line.

Fabrication

1. Cut a 2″ × 6″ piece of thermoplast. Draw a dotted line across the center of the material lengthwise (Fig. 1A).

Fig. 2. A. 1″ cone shaped point. B. 3″ long and ½ inch in height dome, from center to right end of material. C. Rounded corners drawn onto thermoplast.

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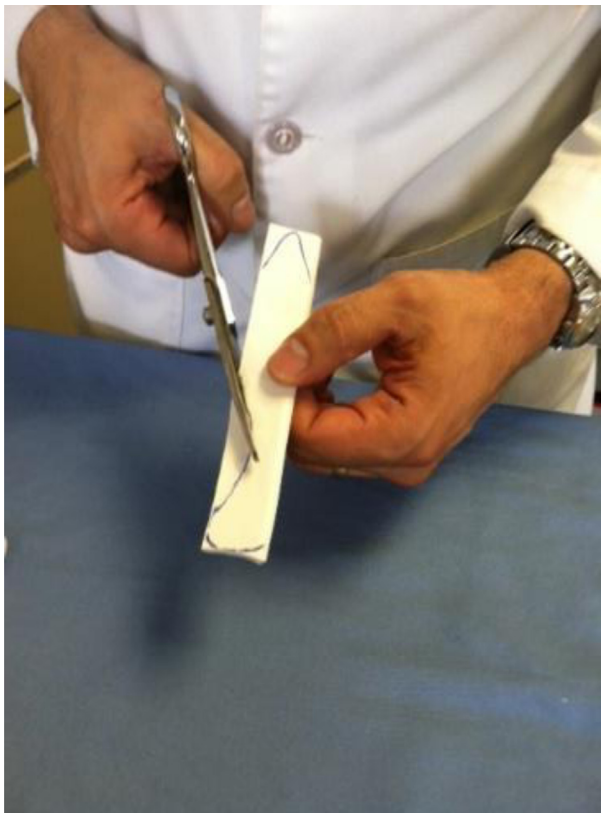

Fig. 3. Therapist cutting away marked areas.

Fig. 4. Therapist smoothing out rough treatment edges.

Fig. 5. Beveling treatment edges.

Fig. 6. Scar nudging.