

Chapter 5 -- Section 1 -- Compression Therapy

There are two forms of compression that we suggest to implement in order to get your best possible results with the SMR exercises: compression garments and elastic straps. Each can assist your body in getting proper circulation to overworked or injured areas. These tools will not make up for really bad form in your training or eating a really crappy diet. They will however support your recovery efforts and, when used properly, can be just the boost you need to get past the sticking point in your recovery.

Compression garments such as pictured at right are usually worn for extended periods of time. Whether it is for a one hour workout or all night while sleeping, these garments are worn to improve circulation, decrease fatigue, and improve recovery. There are many different companies manufacturing garments for each body part. They can be very helpful for joint troubles like tennis elbow or runner's knee and numerous muscle issues such as fatigue, strains and trigger points. This modality of compression is the safest and easiest to integrate into your lifestyle.



Compression Pants

Compression straps such as pictured below are usually worn for very brief periods of time (30 seconds to 2 minutes).



4 different strength compression straps

It is a good idea to limit the use of a compression strap to not more than two minutes at one time. This method of compression is applied to a limb with a dull ache or excessive joint tension. Many people experience a dramatic decrease in sensitivity when using a roller or ball if they use a compression strap immediately prior to practicing

SMR techniques (the roller won't hurt as much).

If you do not move your limb while the strap is worn it can act like a tourniquet and cause tissue damage, so more is NOT better. The straps we recommend currently come in 4 different strengths. It is good to have at least two of these straps because your arms are not likely to benefit from the same level of compression as your legs. You also will experience times following an extreme physical challenge in which the usual level of compression is simply too much for your muscles to endure and your discomfort increases after use. The best evidence you can use to determine the effectiveness of any compression strap is the relief you get immediately following its removal. If you get a "waterfall-like" sensation of circulation through the limb you just strapped and your limb feels "lighter" or "more fluid" when moving it, then you are on the right track. If you get more cramping or an increase in a dull ache in the wrapped limb then the strap you are using is either too strong or it is being wrapped too tightly around your arm or leg. Use your best judgment when choosing the strength of strap and level of tightness as you wrap.

If you have varicose veins you should choose compression garments instead of compression straps as the straps may lead to some clotting while wrapped around your limb and blood begins to pool in the overstretched blood vessels. This could lead to a life-threatening situation as the clot later moves through the bloodstream.

If you limit each compression strap application to two minutes or less you can safely use them many times each day (even as many as 10-20 times per day). Strapping your arms or legs between sets of very few or single-rep maximum lifts can greatly help big muscles lift bigger! NEVER strap more than one limb at a time (nor your neck).



advanced compression technique with a small ball inside the strap

Chapter 5 -- Section 1 -- How to use a Compression Strap

Helpful if used properly, DANGEROUS is used improperly



Levels of resistance for each compression strap
2-6 lbs 3-9 lbs 4-11 lbs 5-13 lbs

If you are on pain killers or have a condition that limits your ability to feel the difference between pressure and pain in the area you are using the strap then you **SHOULD NOT USE** this set of tools. Instead go hire a proper therapist (massage, chiro, PT) to assist you in addressing your issue.

You can use this tool multiple times a day, just limit each use to not more than 2 minutes at a time.



1. Place the strap flat against your limb and begin wrapping it completely around your limb while keeping the rubber strap flat and slightly overlapped as you wrap (see pic at right).
2. Wrap so that the strap spreads out about 4 to 6 inches along your limb, but ensure there are no gaps so that your skin is not pinched between layers of the strap.
3. On the last wrap around your limb relax the amount of stretch placed on the strap so that you can tuck the last 2 inches or so back under the previous wrap.
4. If the strap is not almost uncomfortably tight then you need to wrap it again but tighter. There is a difference between the squeeze you will feel from tight compression and the pain you will feel from too much compression. If at any time you feel pain, REMOVE THE STRAP! This tool is potentially dangerous, so mind your own limits. If you are not sure of what you are doing, seek the help of a qualified healthcare professional (massage or physical therapist, chiro, etc.).
5. Once you have the strap sufficiently tight, do a series of 2 or 3 slow and methodical movements such as airsquats or stationary lunges then do a different movement. AVOID BRISK MOVEMENTS such as jumping or movements such as lateral lunges (sideways lunges) which require more stretch than your tissues can handle with the strap on.
6. After no more than two minutes (or the compression begins to become painful) remove the strap and note how you feel. When you remove the strap you should feel a waterfall-like sensation of blood flow through the area you just strapped. You should also notice that your limb feels lighter and moves more freely. If this is not the case, use a different level of compression strap or different strength strap. Consult your local healthcare professional if you have any questions.
7. If you ever feel like your muscles want to cramp up after removing the compression strap then that strap was TOO STRONG for your muscle mass at this point in time. It is likely that from time to time you will need to use a lighter strength compression strap because your muscles are a bit more worn out than usual and the strap you usually use is too strong to be effective. Always note your results as soon as you remove the strap to determine if you are using the right level of compression. If you wrap the strap as tight as possible and it still doesn't do anything then you need the next level stronger strap or you need to consult your local healthcare professional.



advanced compression technique with a small ball inside the strap

Regular use of the right level of compression can be a wonderful tool in your self-care toolbox. Learn how to apply this tool so that you maximize the benefits and minimize the risks.