
ASTYM: Freeing Patients from Pain and Improving Mobility

ASTYM is not a new technique used to treat physical therapy patients. In fact, it has been around for about 15 years, but the continual improvement in the protocol and case studies are increasing evidence that ASTYM is a valuable tool.

ASTYM is a treatment option for patients suffering from repetitive use conditions such as lateral and medial epicondylitis, carpal tunnel, as well as Patellar and Achilles tendinitis and bursitis. It has also been found to be very successful at reducing post-surgical/post-traumatic scarring, in addition to being used to improve sprains/strains of soft tissue suffered by many professional and recreational athletes.

Our bodies have a natural healing response that they undergo with every injury or with the repetitive nature of our daily tasks. When an individual begins to experience pain, he/she may accommodate for the pain by limiting his/her normal motions, by altering normal mechanics with bracing or splinting, or by stopping movement altogether. This then changes the usual way the body lays down its repair tissue; the normal pulls or forces on the soft tissue fibers—which would normally help realign the repair fibers—are absent. Over time, the actual tissue can change from healthy tissue to abnormal, poorly vascularized tissue that is ineffective in producing normal motion. This can cause pain.

The goal of ASTYM is to stimulate the body's healing response, help it reabsorb the old scar tissue, and regenerate new healthy tissue/collagen via growth factors and platelets. ASTYM can even be used to restore function to injured areas resulting from chronic conditions. While the patient is receiving the treatment, he/she is encouraged to stay active, letting pain be his/her guide to allow the body the opportunity to experience the normal motions it needs. This will help the regenerated tissue to realign correctly. Within 4 to 5 weeks, with ASTYM treatment twice a week, most patients have resolution of their symptoms.

ASTYM is an evidence-based practice option for those therapists who decide to become certified in the technique. The case studies show many conditions to have at least 80 to 90% effectiveness, with patients reporting a high level of satisfaction with their outcomes.

I was certified in ASTYM in October 2008. Before that, I had been treating many repetitive use injuries and would see positive results. However, the pain would sometimes return and I would end up seeing the patients again. Frustrated that the problems wouldn't resolve completely, I decided to try ASTYM to see if I could effectively assist the soft tissue and have healing that would be more long-term for my patients. With ASTYM, as well as strengthening, stretching, and a home program, my patients feel great and often see improvement within a few treatments. For more information, visit www.astym.com.

Angela Spencer, PT

Angela Spencer, PT, is the facility manager of the Accelerated Rehabilitation Centers in Urbandale, IA. She has been employed with Accelerated for 8 years, is certified in ASTYM, and specializes in outpatient orthopedics and sports injuries. Angela is also currently working toward her manual certification in orthopedics through the North American Institute of Orthopaedic Manual Therapy (NAIOMT)