

Clinical Pearl: Voodoo Band Flossing to Treat Epicondylitis

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Epicondylitis is a common pathology, especially in overhead athletes, that involves pain of the forearm flexors or extensors at their attachment site. This pathology can occur via lesions such as trigger points or microtrauma located in the tissue and is presented as a chronic or acute condition.¹ Common treatments include a “wait and see” policy, orthotic devices that relieve tension from the attachment site, or any number of therapeutic modalities thought to alleviate symptoms.¹ These treatments almost always involve inconvenient rest periods that prevent active persons from keeping their current level of activity. One method of treatment for joint ailments such as Epicondylitis that is quickly gaining popularity is the use of a “Voodoo Floss Band” by Rogue Fitness^{inc}.²

The voodoo band is a hyperelastic rubber band, two inches in diameter, which is wrapped around a joint, with the strap initially laid over a pathologic area. The bands are wrapped extremely tight, overlapping 50% of each successive wrapping. Once a brief tourniquet effect has been achieved, a clinician will perform passive range of motion exercises of a joint resembling joint mobilization through a patient’s available range of motion.^{2,3} This band popularly used and praised by Dr. Kelly Starrett DPT, author of the book *Becoming a Supple Leopard*³ shows numerous accounts of anecdotal success with the use of the bands, but there exists little to no scientific research performed that reports the validity of these bands and their acclaimed usage. It is this author’s belief that the voodoo floss bands combine basic scientific theories of ischemic compression, active release technique (ART,) and Graston technique[®] in an attempt to promote tissue healing and adhesion breakup within joints.

Ischemic compression is a physical therapy technique commonly used to treat trigger points. Pressure is applied to a pressure point, or site of pain, and gradually increased up to the subject’s maximal pain tolerance for about a 15 second period.⁴ During this pressure the trigger point will release and there will be a increase in blood flow to compensate for the hypoxia that occurred due to pressure. The increase in blood will bring in larger quantities of chemical mediators and healing factors that would allow tissue to heal, such as in the elbow.⁴ Voodoo band flossing involves compression of the joint close to the patient’s maximal pain tolerance and is applied until an “ashy” appearance of the distal segment of the involved extremity is noted. Once released, a visible reddening of the affected area can be seen, noting the increased supply of blood returning to the hypoxic tissue.

Active Release Technique is a manual therapy technique that involves the palpation of restricted tissues following an applied pressure to the same tissue while the involved limb is moved through a passive range of motion.⁵ This allows a fulcrum effect from the palpation to stretch and release the involved area. Graston technique[®] produces similar effects through the use of patented instruments. One technique that Graston uses is a strumming effect of rubbing a blade repeatedly across the tissue adhesion or injury point in order to break up the tissue and return blood flow.⁵ Dr. Starrett claims a similar procedure through initial strap placement over the targeted area to recreate a similar effect.³

With these different techniques serving as a basis for Voodoo flossing theory, and through anecdotal patient outcomes, voodoo bands can be seen as a viable treatment method for injuries such as Epicondylitis. Increased blood flow and breakup of adhesions would prove beneficial to a myriad of patients. In conclusion, while voodoo floss bands

have little supporting evidence, it has been seen to be a successful, fresh, and innovative treatment technique for reducing joint pain and restoring range of motion.

Competing Interest:

The author of this clinical pearl has no competing interests or affiliations with Rogue Fitness or their products including but not limited to the Voodoo band.

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