**Connective Tissue and Fascia**

Connective tissues form a continuous netlike framework throughout the body. Connective tissue consists largely of a fluid matrix (ground substance) and collagen fibers that support, bind, and connect the wide range of body structures. Depending on its consistency and the varying proportions of fluid to fibers, wide arrays of connective tissues are formed. Some examples are the fluid intercellular environment, the superficial fascia just below the skin, the fascia of the muscles, the tendons and ligaments, the tough cartilage, and even bone.

The muscular system is a highly organized system of compartmentalized contractile fibrous tissues that work together to produce movement. The contractile tissue is organized and supported by an intricate network of connective tissue commonly called *fascia*. *Fascia* organizes muscles into functional groups, surrounds each individual muscle, extends inward throughout the muscle creating muscle bundles, and eventually surrounds each muscle fiber. Connective tissue also creates a supporting structure of the intricate network of blood vessels and nerves. The fascia projects beyond the ends of the muscle to become tendons or flat tendinous sheaths (aponeuroses) that connect the muscles to other structures. Aponeuroses can attach muscles to bones, to other muscles, or to the skin; tendons intertwine with the fibrous coverings of bones (periosteum). Other connective tissue binds and supports the organs and structures in their proper place and forms anchors for lymph and blood vessels and nerves, holding them in their proper place among the organs, muscles, and bones.

The *superficial fascia* is situated just below the skin and coves the entire muscular system. The fascia penetrates to the bone (deep fascia), separating muscle groups and covering individual muscles, holding them in their relative positions and at the same time allowing them to move somewhat independently. The layer of fascia that closely covers an individual muscle is the *epimysium.* The *perimysium* extends inward from the epimysium and separates the muscle into bundles of muscle fibers or *fascicles*. Within the fascicle, each muscle fiber has a delicate connective tissue covering called the *endomysium*. Indeed, muscle tissue and fascia are structurally and functionally inseparable. The term *myofascial* has been coined to describe the combined muscle and fascial tissues.

The connective tissue organizes the muscle fibers and connects the muscle to tendons, tendons to bones, and even bones to bones. Without this complicated system of connecting sheets, hinges, and ropes that transfers the action of the muscle fibers to the levers of the skeleton, motion and postural stability would not be possible.

 ~ From Theory and Practice of Therapeutic Massage *by Mark F. Beck*.