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**SF SPORTS MASSAGE THERAPY  
AND INJURY PREVENTION**

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## What *Muscle Imbalances* Mean in Sports Massage Physiology

In sports massage and movement physiology, **muscle imbalances** refer to a state where opposing muscle groups no longer share an optimal relationship in **length, tension,** or **strength**. This disrupts normal joint mechanics and increases mechanical stress on tissues.

Below is the physiology behind it, explained in a way that's clinically accurate but easy to communicate to clients.



### 1. Length-Tension Imbalance

Muscles function best at an optimal resting length. When one muscle becomes **shortened and overactive**, its opposing muscle often becomes **lengthened and inhibited**.

#### Physiological effects

- Shortened muscles develop increased **passive tension**
- Lengthened muscles lose **force-producing capacity**
- Joint alignment shifts, altering movement patterns

#### Example

- Tight hip flexors → inhibited glutes
- Tight pecs → lengthened, underactive mid-back muscles



### 2. Neuromuscular Imbalance

This is about the **nervous system's control**, not just the muscle tissue.

#### What happens

**RECOVER  
REVIVE  
BALANCE**

- Overactive muscles receive excessive neural input
- Underactive muscles receive reduced input
- The body compensates by recruiting the wrong muscles for a task

This is why clients often say, “I feel this in my lower back instead of my glutes.”

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### **3. Joint Mechanics Imbalance**

When muscles around a joint pull unevenly, the joint no longer tracks smoothly.

#### **Consequences**

- Increased shear or compressive forces
  - Irritation of surrounding soft tissues
  - Reduced range of motion
  - Higher injury risk during sport or repetitive tasks
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### **4. Fascial and Soft Tissue Adaptation**

Chronic imbalance leads to structural changes in soft tissue.

#### **Examples**

- Increased fascial stiffness in overused areas
  - Trigger points forming in overloaded muscles
  - Reduced glide between tissue layers
  - Compensatory tension spreading through kinetic chains
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## 5. Functional Movement Imbalance

This is where the physiology becomes visible in real movement.

### Signs

- Asymmetrical gait
- Over-reliance on dominant muscles
- Poor load distribution
- Reduced efficiency and performance

Sports massage often reveals this through palpation, ROM testing, and observing movement patterns.

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### Why Muscle Imbalances Matter in Sports Massage

Sports massage doesn't "fix" imbalances by strengthening or prescribing exercise — but it **optimises the soft tissue environment** so the body can restore balance more effectively.

### Massage can help by:

- Reducing tone in overactive muscles
- Improving tissue extensibility
- Enhancing circulation and recovery
- Increasing proprioceptive awareness
- Supporting better movement quality

This fits perfectly with your scope as SF Sports Massage & Injury Prevention: hands-on treatment, education, and helping clients move more freely.

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