



## How Kinesiology Tape Can Help the Masses

BY MARK DETERLINE

The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games probably marked the moment in sports history when kinesiology tape first raised public awareness—or curiosity—on a large scale. Pro beach volleyball player Kerri Walsh had some on her shoulder, and talk went from, “Is that a tattoo?” to “Tape? You mean like an Icy Hot patch?” to “It’s an elastic tape without a warming/cooling effect that is actually supposed to stabilize and speed healing?” For many, it sounded like a stretch.

### HISTORY OF KINESIOLOGY TAPE

Kinesiology tape was developed more than 25 years ago by U.S.-trained chiropractor Dr. Kenzo Kase. Despite its obscurity in the mainstream until Beijing, it has enjoyed widespread use internationally by progressive chiropractors, physical therapists and sports doctors for at

least a decade. Lance Armstrong mentions its use by professional cycling team support staff in his book “Every Second Counts.”

Kinesio tape was developed as an alternative to non-flexible tapes that were previously the standard. As an alternative to rigid taping methods intended to stabilize muscles or joints for semi-immobile recovery and healing, kinesiology tape was designed to serve those original purposes while enabling athletes to return to competition or training sooner—in many cases, immediately.

Explanations of what kinesio tape can do are met with a combination of skepticism and wonder. However, when an accomplished expert like chiropractor Dr. Ted Forcum, a veteran member of summer and winter Olympics sports medical teams, enthusiastically explains the broad range of injuries and ailments that

can be addressed with the tape, one can’t help but try it. Forcum first received professional training in non-elastic taping 27 years ago, but the arrival and continual improvement of elastic taping products have enabled him to develop more versatile taping methods.

I contacted Lumos Inc., one of a growing number of kinesiology tape manufacturers and the maker of KT Tape, to ask if I could try it. I’ve developed knee soreness due to riding many different bikes, shoes and pedal systems this season, and I have one shoulder/neck area that tends to get tight when I spend a lot of time at the computer.

Jim Jenson, vice president of sales and marketing at Lumos, provided some background regarding the history and use of kinesiology tape as well as why his product is user-friendly, and well-suited for professional use.

According to Jenson, KT Tape is the only pre-cut tape on the market—one of those innovations that seems obvious in hindsight. Other brands come in a single long roll which requires both inexperienced and experienced users to cut it for specific applications. Jenson explained that filming multiple chiropractors while they cut and applied kinesiology tape from rolls inspired them to implement three features in the design and manufacture of KT Tape: the strips are pre-cut to a standard 10-inch length; corners are rounded off to ensure better adhesion, especially for use in water; and a perforated line runs down the middle and most of the length of each strip so that one can easily pull apart the ends and apply as a commonly used Y-shape.

Jenson also says that in making an effective kinesiology tape, it’s important to give it the right adhesive pattern and tackiness to stay on despite activity, bodily oils, sweat and water.

I followed up that correspondence with a call to the expert. Here are some of the things Forcum mentioned during our phone interview, many of which seem to warrant more in-depth discussions. He essentially broke down the use of kinesiology tape into two primary approaches: function and stabilization.

### FUNCTION AND STABILIZATION

Forcum used the example of a swimmer with a shoulder injury. In this case, the body wants to compensate for the injury, which could increase the tone of one muscle and decrease the tone of another. Kinesio taping can preserve balance by encouraging continued full range of motion of the affected area by providing dynamic support, lymphatic drainage for less swelling and quicker healing and reduced pain. The same would apply to an ankle sprain.

A stabilization approach would strive for



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the same result that rigid taping provides, but without limiting activity and movement. Forcum said that in this scenario, the goal is to maintain proper positioning and movement of joints and muscles along their desired natural arc to avoid further aggravation to the affected area while enabling an individual to be active during healing.

Other issues kinesiology tape can address, often with a single strip of tape include:

- ▶ Reproducibility of motion
- ▶ Balance across a joint
- ▶ Facilitation of energy storing and release using the elastic quality of the tape for parallel elastic (kinetic) energy during eccentric contractions
- ▶ Improvement of performance by reducing load
- ▶ Increase in muscle tone to get a muscle to “fire” better
- ▶ Mechanical control joint movement, even moving it over to another plane to enhance muscle “fullness”

After receiving some tape from Jenson, I asked the new, young-gun chiropractor at Olson Chiropractic in Northern California if she knew anything about kinesiology taping.

“Sure,” Dr. Johanna Lelke replied. “I was trained by a well-known authority on the discipline, Ted Forcum.”

Small world. I had figured Lelke might have experience in this area since she had recently been brought on staff to expand their implementation of therapeutic treatments, such as active release techniques (ART), the Graston technique and kinesiology taping.

## LEARNING TAPING TECHNIQUES

Lelke recommended we do a supportive Y-strip (one of the standard KT Tape strips) from my shoulder blade to the base of my neck to relieve some of the pressure in that area, and then cut up the already perforated tape for a lymphatic drain along my inner knee. I have seen her do this three times and prefer her taping me instead of trying to do so myself.

When I told Forcum of my preference to have a professional’s help, he said that there are some techniques that most people can become proficient at, but there might be some techniques that an expert can more effectively do, or that he can at least go through with a patient a few times until that person gets the hang of it.

He also mentioned that it can be helpful to have a coach or spouse come in for a doctor’s or therapist’s visit for cases in which the affected area is hard to see or reach. Ultimately, he compared it to getting professionally ana-

lyzed and fitted for running shoes: Learn from an expert how your body wants to move and then gain some technical insights on how best to deal with your own unique needs.

Since Kerri Walsh acted as the original plug for the technology and practice, more and more athletes are claiming positive results and relief through the use of kinesiology tape.

Forcum explained that he had the opportunity to implement kinesiology taping with members of Coors Light’s professional cycling team (which boasted riders like Davis Phinney and Greg LeMond) back in the early ’90s, and then again with cyclists at the Beijing Olympics. In fact, Forcum has worked with athletes of all backgrounds and in many different disciplines, and he has recently been using the latest kinesiology tape products and techniques with Greg and Laura Bennett.

As a new user who is still getting his feet wet, I can only say that Forcum and Lelke’s experience with athletes and their conviction of the effectiveness of kinesiology taping have impressed me. I have greatly benefited from competent chiropractic, ART and massage therapy, so if the best of these disciplines are advocating the use of kinesiology tape, I think anyone who is struggling with injuries or pain should at least be open to trying it. And if the Bennetts are doing it, you don’t need to take it from experts you don’t know or from companies who are marketing their own products.

Over the past few weeks, I have noticed a difference, albeit subtle. My left shoulder/neck area was less tight the days I had tape on it—each tape application would stay put two to four days at a time. And the lymphatic drain configuration that Lelke applied to my inner knees on three different occasions seemed to make my knees more sensitive to post-ride icing, implying increased blood and lymphatic flow.

To emphasize the relevance of kinesiology taping for all types of lifestyles and sports activities, Forcum was excited to report that one of his age-grouper clients was able to complete Ford Ironman Coeur d’Alene despite a hip injury.

Ultimately, the accomplished expert believes that cyclists, triathletes and active individuals of all backgrounds will benefit and can become self-empowered through this technique, explaining, “I wish I had this back when I was an athlete.”

*You can find Ted Forcum’s biography at [Bimsportsinjuries.com](http://Bimsportsinjuries.com). To learn more about Kerri Walsh-endorsed KT Tape, visit [Kttape.com](http://Kttape.com). Professional women’s cycling sponsor Rocktape can be found at [Rocktape.com](http://Rocktape.com).*