

Article 2: Trigger Points
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In my last article, I referenced 4 books about trigger points. I suggest a way to think of Trigger Points (TPs, for short) here:

When a muscle is overstressed, minute tears in some of the fibers can occur. The body has evolved an effective way of repairing these damages: it recruits undamaged fibers immediately next to the damaged fibers and they tighten up to reduce tension on the damaged fibers. This allows the body to make repairs and rebuild the damaged fibers. Most of the time, this works extremely well - we might feel a little discomfort for a few days, and then we are back to normal.

Unfortunately, sometimes the process doesn't work like that. In these cases, the recruited fibers are over-enthusiastic; they end up restricting blood flow. When they restrict blood flow too much, the fibers heal slowly, if at all.

The result is a tight knot within the body of a muscle that restricts motion - full extension becomes very painful and the muscle is weaker than it was, since many of its fibers are busy "protecting" the damaged area. This condition can persist for years. It also appears to me that sometimes the "protected" fibers can actually die due to lack of blood circulation. In this case, the knot tends to remain forever.

The correct kind of massage can find these knots and help the body release them. This also releases the armor that has made the muscle more rigid and weaker. With sufficiently gentle care, the body can complete the repair of the damaged fibers. In the case where the muscle fibers appear to have died, maintenance massages seem to be required to help maintain flexibility in the resulting scar tissue.

Basic Rules for avoiding Trigger Points:

- Never bend and lift or pull with the back twisted
- Always lift with the knees, holding the back erect and forward facing.
- Never get up from, or sit down in, a chair while leaning forward in the stooped position with the trunk rotated.
- Avoid jerky movements -- these cause unnecessary stress.
- Observe how you do common tasks and minimize unnecessary movements.
- Muscle fibers need to alternately contract and relax to increase blood flow and replenish energy supplies. Avoid keeping muscles in a contracted or fully stretched position - awake OR sleeping.
- Avoid using muscles at maximum effort, when they are most likely to be strained. Always leave some reserve. Figure a different way to do the task, if necessary.
- Avoid cold drafts -- causes muscular contraction and invites activation of TPs.
- Take a hot shower or bath after exercise.
- Stretch frequently, but not to pain. Go for full ROM, but in sloooow steps.
- Be more like a cat -- stretch before moving.
- Strengthen support muscles -- hold maximal contraction for 5-10 seconds once a day is enough.

- For lower back pain. practice the yoga Boat posture to strengthen your abdominals



- Practice the yoga Locust posture to strengthen your lower back – arms forward (shown) is more difficult



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Trigger Point Perpetuating Factors:

- Physical imbalances like uneven leg length or short arms.
- Mis-fitting furniture.
- Poor posture.
- Immobility.
- Frequent repetitive movement
- Constricting pressure on muscles -- packs, heavy purses, belts, bras, edges of chairs---
- Nutritional inadequacies, especially vitamins B1, B6, B12, Folic Acid, & C; minerals calcium, iron, potassium, & magnesium.
- Alcohol use; oral contraceptives; vegan, starchy, or crash diets; & cigarette smoking can all contribute to vitamin deficiencies.
- According to Travell & Simons, “Nearly half of the patients we see with chronic myofascial pain require resolution of vitamin inadequacies for lasting relief.”
- RDA for vitamins merely prevents disease, not optimal body function.

Tests have shown that many water-soluble vitamins (including B1, B6, B12, Folic Acid, & C) appear to cause no problems at dosages as high as 100xRDA or even more.

NEXT: Article 3: Acute Pain vs Chronic Pain

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