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TRIGGER POINTS

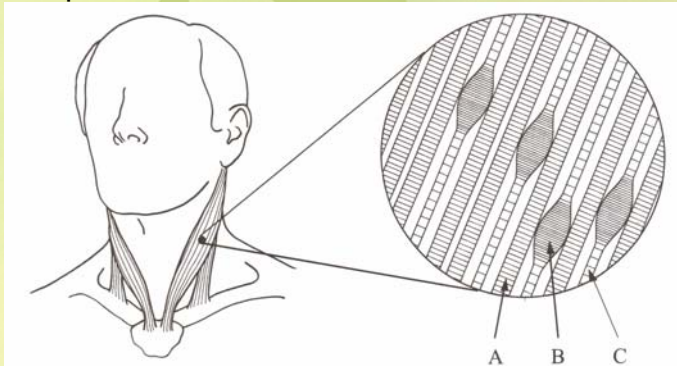
SEPTEMBER 2006 NEWSLETTER

The most frequently asked question of the past month has been ...“What IS a knot anyway?” Sometimes I get a mental picture of myself literally untying knotted strands of fiber and rope in one’s back!

Since this “knotty” question has been asked by even veteran massage clients, this is a good time to explain trigger points (knots).

Muscle cells are long and cylindrical fibers bundled together to make a full muscle, of which there are two attachment points, the Origin and the Insertion (ie: the beginning and the end). Within each muscle fiber are numerous microscopic sarcomeres [sarko-meers], and this is where muscle contraction actually takes place. Millions of sarcomeres have to contract for you to make even the smallest movement in your body! Sarcomeres also act like tiny pumps, contracting and releasing to circulate blood, but when over stimulated, they become unable to release their contracted state, and stay “bunched up”, forming a trigger point. The resulting stoppage of blood flow in the immediate area is followed by oxygen starvation and accumulation of metabolic waste products, which further irritates the trigger point.

In the magnified picture of the neck muscle fibers, note the bulges where the segment has drawn up, becoming shorter and wider. These bulges are trigger points, which feel like nodules under the skin, and hurt like heck when compressed.



Trigger points have been thoroughly studied, validated and documented by Dr.'s Travell and Simons in the 1950's, and they demonstrated that trigger points generate and receive electrical

currents, communicating with the nervous system. Pain signals are sent out until the brain institutes a “policy of rest” for the muscle. The outcome is that the muscle shortens and tightens, and other muscles in the area become affected as well, due to compensation.

What causes a trigger point? Accidents, falls, strains, and overwork, especially if it is an unaccustomed overload. Trigger point pain is typically an uncomfortably deep ache, but movements can make it feel sharp at times. Symptoms aren't always limited to the sense of pain though. Muscle or joint stiffness, weakness, swelling, nausea, dizziness, headaches, sinus pain, sore throat, stomachaches, and heartburn are among a few of the variable signs of a trigger point (depending on where it is). A muscle with trigger points can compress an artery, making a distant body part feel cold; or a nerve, resulting in numbness, tingling and sensitivity in areas served by the nerve. Another interesting characteristic is that some trigger points can cause pain from a site distant from where the actual knot is. For example, trigger points in the neck muscle shown here can send pain deep into the ear, the eye, sinuses, back teeth, root of the tongue, and cause frontal headaches.

During massage, trigger points tend to “hurt good” – this is beneficial as it disrupts the neurological feedback loop that maintains the trigger point. Painkilling endorphins also flood the area, making it less sensitive to pressure, and your therapist should always check in frequently to make sure it is tolerable for you.

Trigger point therapy is one of the techniques I employ in my massage treatments. If you've been experiencing an elusive, hard-to-pinpoint deep and achey pain (or any other symptoms described), please call or email me for an appointment.

*Information resources for this newsletter:
The Trigger Point Therapy Workbook, Clair Davies*