



MY ELITE MASSAGE

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Office Hours

Mondays 1:30PM–7:00PM
Tuesdays 9:00AM–1:00PM
Wednesdays 5:00PM–7:00PM
Thursdays 9:00AM–1:00PM
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Off the Table

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Photo from NancyWilson.com

WHY YOUR PAIN IS MOST LIKELY NOT WHERE THE PROBLEM IS



By Kevin Smith, LMT, MMP

Muscle pain can sometimes reliably indicate its source, but most often your pain is at the end of a kind of domino effect in your body and the better-informed therapists know to look for other causes. Most therapists understand the tug-of-war effect between opposing muscles such as your pecs (clenched tight) and your back or neck muscles (for example, your rhomboids between the shoulder blades or your levator scapulae from your neck to your shoulder blades which get pulled tight) and will try to help to rebalance them with stretching out the clenched muscle. The better ones will also work to restore the natural resting length to both sets of muscles.

Scar tissue can do a similar pull on your fascia, causing it to trigger pain in areas further away from the scar. Women who have had C-sections (or anyone with abdominal surgeries) sometimes experience new back pain afterward that does not dissipate over time; this pain has more to do with the scar tissue pulling on the fascia than it does with the birth.

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Why Your Pain is Probably not Where the Problem is. (cont.)

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Nerves can refer pain to another point of the body as well. There are over a dozen points along the track of the nerve into and down your arm that, if impinged, can create the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome – and more than one can be contributing.

The last thing I'll mention is your ligaments. Robert Libbey, RMT, has compiled years of research regarding Ligamentous Pain Referral Patterns that, once again, send pain signals to another part of the body. In fact, if you overlay an image of the ligamentous pain referral sites over an image of trigger point sites, you will find they are nearly identical, suggesting that, while trigger-point therapy is absolutely a valid approach, ligamentous pain patterns should also be considered during treatment.

So don't be surprised if your quality therapist seems to ignore the place you mentioned as hurting until after assessing other areas. He or she may be treating the cause of the pain rather than just rubbing the sore muscle. That said, you should never be afraid to ask if that is what they are doing. After all, we are all susceptible to distractions and forgetting things from time to time so asking can be a gentle reminder or an invitation to explain how what he or she is doing will help with your pain issue – and the more you understand about the contributing causes, the more likely you will have an "A-ha!" moment in your everyday life that may help you find simple lifestyle tweaks that can prevent that pain from returning.



"IF YOUR BACK HURTS, IT'S YOUR BUTT'S FAULT"

By Kevin Smith, LMT, MMP

Believed to be originated by myoskeletal alignment master, Erik Dalton, PhD, this is one of the more humorous quotes floating around the massage world. And it is almost always true thanks to this little law of the body called recipricol inhibition..

Recipricol inhibition is just a shorthand way of saying muscles that do the opposite action cannot both work at the same time. For example, if you bend your elbow, your biceps are working and your triceps are letting go. Straighten your arm and the triceps go to work while the biceps take a break.

The same thing happens with your hip flexors and extensors. When you sit, or sleep with your hips flexed, for hours at a time, recipricol inhibition more or less turns off your glutes and other hip extensors. When your body gets used to this, your largest hip extensor muscles, the glutes, become what we call "weak and inhibited", and fail to do their job fully, if at all.

That means other muscles are picking up the slack and in the case of hip extension, it's the Quadratus Lumborums, a.k.a. the QL's – those low back muscles between your ribs and pelvis. If you are struggling with low back pain just getting up in the morning, standing after sitting for awhile, or at the end of a walk, this – often in conjunction with a limited range of motion in the hip joint (which again makes Dalton's statement valid) – is the most likely culprit.

To counter this at home, I highly recommend using glute activation exercises, such as bridges, first thing in the morning. And to get a head start, I suggest pain-free muscle spindle cell activation as part of an orthopedic massage, to restore strength and activate your glute muscles as well as restore function and independence to your hip joints so that you can live your life free of this completely unnecessary back pain.

"We need touch, but most importantly we need conscious touch, a moment when somebody is connecting with us skin to skin and is also aware that this is happening."

~ Mary O'Malley, *Belonging to Life*

Be Smart with Smartphones

Tips for Avoiding Injury

Have you ever noticed that your neck gets cranky after an extended Angry Birds binge? Or your thumb starts to throb the day after sending 40 emails from your phone during a particularly boring meeting? With more people spending more time on their smartphones, stories of repetitive strain injuries like these are on the rise.

Certified Hellerwork practitioner and licensed massage therapist Joseph Hunton has seen, and experienced, the results of overuse and improper ergonomics when it comes to these devices. "I had been sitting and standing with my head bent over the phone while holding it and making fine finger movements for hours at a time," Hunton says of the days that followed the arrival of his new smartphone. "This was a recipe for strain and pain."

BEING SMART

Hunton encourages smartphone users to stretch and take frequent breaks, and cautions that improper use may result in a stiff neck, sore upper back,

and tight arms. Here are some more smartphone ergonomic tips to avoid the pain:

- Bring the phone up to your line of sight to keep your head aligned with your spine.
- Use a wireless headset to prevent arm strain.
- Never hold the phone between your head and shoulder.

Frequent smartphone use can also cause repetitive strain injuries of the thumb. Hunton reminds us to use our smartphones intelligently. "Although it can perform many functions, it is not really a computer, gaming station, or video monitor," he says.

OPTIONS FOR RELIEF

Stretching, limiting your smartphone use, and receiving frequent massage are all successful ways to alleviate the strain caused by repetitive use. Listen to your body, and communicate with your massage therapist about any pain or discomfort that might arise from the use of these devices.

FROM TOE TO HEAD

What's the Big Deal About the Big Toe?

By Kevin Smith, LMT, MMP

INTRODUCTION

This new series of articles will cover as much of the body as possible from toe to head. Toe to head? Why not head to toe?

It's a good question that actually goes into my thought process of where to start a client's massage. I typically try to reduce or eliminate the pain first when starting a massage, but this doesn't mean I immediately work on the pain's location; but rather on what is feeding into the cause of the pain. In the case of "pins & needles" or similar neurologically-based issues, the brain is the starting point of your nervous system, so starting at the head and neck makes the most logical sense.

Most often though, clients present with structural issues, which tend to move up the body in an ascending pattern. For example, a structural foot issue can potentially, due to compensation patterns, cause problems far enough up the body to initiate a migraine.

My hope is, as we go from toe to head, that you will maybe pick up something helpful to keep your body functioning the way it's designed to work in between your regular massage appointments.

THE BIG TOE

The big toe is important for more than just finding random objects in the dark; it's an important part of our body's function all the way up the body. According to an article by Dr. Brian Abelson, DC, the big toe "plays a critical role in both shock absorption and propulsion." In fact its first joint bears 40-60% of the body's weight when your foot is weight-bearing as you walk. It also is essential to

stabilizing the arch while walking or running when all your weight is on one leg, and when your foot "takes off", propelling you forward.

The two most common factors impinging the big toe's ability to do its job is misalignment and loss of mobility. And these things have a domino effect up the entire body. A simple misalignment of the big toe can decrease foot stability, leading to pronation (feet flared outward), then to over-stretched ligaments and "plantar fasciitis" pain, as well as knock-knees, an unbalanced pelvic floor, lumbar rotoscoliosis, and back, neck, and shoulder misalignments and pain. With all of this cause-and-effect in play, you can see why a good manual therapist wants to check your full body when you come in complaining of a headache.

Immobility of the big toe has similar results. Optimize Pelvic Health explains that "you need proper big toe extension (towards the body) for a healthy pelvic floor." If it is stiff when you walk, your foot/leg will turn outward or you will swivel off the foot – either of which changes the activation of the pelvic floor muscles – again, creating a domino effect up the entirety of your body.

To test your big toe's mobility, while your foot is on the ground and keeping the balls of your feet down, use your hand to pull up the toe. You're looking for an easy lift of at least 45 degrees and for the toe to "SLIDE and GLIDE" (or it will jam the top of the joint).

Learn more and find helpful corrective exercises at @GaitHappens and @optimizepelvichealth on instagram or on their webpages..

Why Is It So Hard to Sit Up Straight?

By Kevin Smith, LMT, MMP

There are a lot of answers to this question but probably the simplest one is, our modern culture doesn't reinforce good posture. Computers, phones, cars (or any modern mode of travel), and most furniture pieces – even modern baby carriers – are designed to put our torso in a flexed "C" shape, tilting the pelvis back, rounding our shoulders and spine, and pushing our heads out in front of our chests – all of which leave our bodies unstable and tense.

Try holding your knees as you sit down on the edge of your chair and feel how supported your spine feels with your hips just slightly tilted forward. From there, roll back your shoulders forward, up, and then back as far as is comfortable and let them drop into this new position, fully relaxed. Next, "float" your head up as if it were a buoy in the water and then notice what these few simple steps can do for your posture.

A good massage helping to restore muscle balance in your body can also help. And for more tips on easily improving your posture, check out the book, "8 Steps to a Pain-Free Back" by Esther Gokhale.