

Understanding Pain The Body's Perspective

Muscles can do quite a bit more than simply flex and release. They can become protectors. Unexplained pain is often because of some kind of past trauma, such as slipping on ice. Mental traumas, such as almost being hit by a car while walking across the street, can also cause pain. Repeated exposure to something while under stress can cause pain, such as wrist pain every time you go near a computer.

Think of muscles as having minds of their own. Your job is to convince your overly protective muscles that it's safe to release the state of perpetual flexion and return to a state of neutral.

Stress Responses to Triggers Can Manifest as Body Pain

Triggers have also been called stressors. The body perceives stressful situations in the form of "triggers". Even without us knowing, the body can be reacting to a trigger by going into fight or flight mode. When this occurs, the body must then re-set the nervous system so that it goes back into wound down mode. It is common for a nervous system to remain in wound up mode, which you could think of as the nervous system's version of perpetual flexion.

We're not always aware of when we've encountered a trigger. We may simply start feeling worse and not understand why. If this occurs, take a moment to look at your surroundings. Was there a sound, a movement out of the corner of your eye, or an odour that may have triggered you? Are you in a place where something bad happened to you in the past?

Central Sensitization: Nothing Medically or Structurally Wrong

This has also been called tension myositis syndrome and mind body syndrome. This is a reaction to a trigger.

Stretching is Putting Yourself in a Position and Letting the Muscles Work Themselves Out.

It's important that you stretch properly, otherwise you could end up with more muscle pain and fatigue. Stretching requires patience. Breathing deeply helps greatly when stretching. Be very relaxed, like a rag doll. Relax into your stretch for at least 1 minute. I normally recommend body positions that my patients rest in for 5-10 minutes.

You don't want to feel discomfort. Imagine your muscles to be like thick elastic bands; you don't want to pull them too quickly, bounce them, or release them too quickly. If they bounce on their own, that's probably fine. You want to stretch when you're warm, not cold. You want to feel a comfortable stretch that feels refreshing. You're looking for a small-medium stretch. If you notice the stretch getting too intense, ease yourself out of the position.

Don't Make Your Joint Click or "Stretch Muscles Out"

It's fine if a joint clicks. You may be used to hearing sounds coming from your neck, knees, or ankles for example. The body gives itself adjustments all the time, but that doesn't mean you should be giving yourself adjustments. Self-adjustments tend to create more problems than they solve, even though we feel some immediate relief from them. Leave the adjustments up to the experts; your body and your chiropractor or osteopath.

Listen Carefully. Is your Body Saying No?

Just because someone tells you that a stretch or exercise routine is good for you doesn't mean they're correct. Listen to your body. Ask your therapist lots of questions to make sure you're doing the right self care techniques for you.

-Dr. Angela, ND