

## **My Approach to Pain Management**

Over the years I've learned that my approach to pain management needs to be a very individual process, and must differ quite a bit between individuals.

### Assessment

With my approach, Step one is to watch your movements as you walk, sit, and move around. I'm watching for patterns of function and dysfunction in your body, for example how well your body movements flow as opposed to robotic or segmented movements.

Next, I ask about your symptoms. I ask you to describe how your function is affected in your day-to-day activities. I also ask for a detailed description about exactly how your painful body area feels.

Next I gently move the painful body area using a technique called passive range of motion. I always stay within your comfort zone. I look for tone in and around the muscles. I apply a bit of pressure to see if the tissue reflexively tenses against that pressure. Based on these types of patterns I start to put the pieces of the puzzle together. I tend to get more information from light touch than firm touch.

Next I instruct you to put yourself in a resting position based on what part of the body needs to be worked on. You may be lying on your side, your back, your front, or you may be sitting down.

### Treatment

#### *Passive Range of Motion*

The first part of the treatment involves passive range of motion as well, but in a therapeutic way. The affected muscle groups are moved around within your comfort zone. The purpose of this technique is to start releasing muscle tension in both deep and superficial layers. This is a little different from some approaches, which start at the superficial layer of muscle and work inward.

#### *Manual Stretching*

Next I incorporate manual stretching, which means that I apply specific stretches in specific directions to the affected muscles. This normally involves stretching the muscles around the painful area first, working my way toward the central area of pain according to what your body allows. This prevents me from forcing your tissues in any way, which I find hinders the effectiveness of this technique. I continually monitor for reflexive tension to occur, and if I notice this occurring I know that I'm either moving too fast or being too assertive with my treatment. Everyone needs a slightly different approach; while some need a very assertive type of treatment, others require a very slow gentle approach.

The goal with passive range of motion and manual stretching is to encourage the affected muscles to tremble and twitch. Not everyone notices when this reflex occurs, but it's apparent to me when it does. This reflex is a process that muscles use to release perpetual flexion (tension) and painful trigger points. I've learned that this is an important part of normalizing function in joints, muscles, fascia, nerves, and circulation.

### *Cupping*

Once the trembling and twitching settles down it's time for the next step of treatment. If you're comfortable with it, I'll do cupping. Cupping is a traditional Chinese technique that I've found to be effective in achieving long term pain relief. It uses suction instead of pressure to treat the deeper layers of muscle and fascia. The cupping technique I use is not painful and does not involve heat. More trembling and twitching occurs, and the cupping portion of treatment is finished when this reflex settles down. Cupping often leaves painless red or purple marks on the body, which can last for 3-14 days. If you feel it's needed, I'll provide you with a document that explains these markings.

### *Acupuncture*

Acupuncture is the next step, if you're willing. My approach to acupuncture is interactive, it's not a matter of simple needle insertion. The goal is to give muscles the opportunity to move out of the state of flexion and return to a state of neutral. A muscle that's tense and sore is in a state of perpetual flexion. In this state a muscle is shorter and thicker. This has a negative effect on the surrounding fascia and joints as well as circulation of the area's nerves, lymph, and blood. When a muscle releases its flexion during acupuncture, it twitches. This causes a momentary state of discomfort, and commonly causes feelings of muscle fatigue after the treatment.

### Education

When the treatment is complete I explain your body's unique patterns of dysfunction according to the subtleties I discovered during my treatment. I then recommend specific movements and body positions to correct the patterns of dysfunction. These individualized self-care techniques are an important part of achieving long term success and empowering you to manage your own pain patterns.

### The Ultimate Goal

This treatment process is meant to enhance the muscles' ability to flex and release in a functional way, thus improving strength, balance, and flexibility. The goals are optimal functioning and a pain-free body.

### Pinched Nerves, Circulation Problems, and Venous Insufficiency

Nerves, blood vessels, and lymph vessels must traverse around muscles of all different shapes, sizes, and directions. As mentioned, perpetually flexed muscles are shorter and thicker. This makes areas of circulation more narrow, which can lead to nerve impingement and other kinds of circulation problems.

### Joint Problems

Muscles are attached to bones by tendons. When muscles are in perpetual flexion (shorter and thicker), tendons will be pulled tightly, similar to the way ropes would be pulled tightly. Many of these tendons are located around joints. For example, some thigh muscles attach to the bone below the knee and some calf muscles attach to the bone above the knee. This creates movement in the knee, but when dysfunctional can cause compression or torsion (subtle twisting) of the joint. This can lead to joint pain and contribute to arthritis related discomfort.

*-Dr. Angela, ND*