

# **How Trigger Points Work**

## **HOW DOES TENSION AFFECT MUSCLES?**

A healthy muscle contracts when it's in use and relaxes when the work is done. Muscles that are affected by stress or trauma, however, may contract and stay tensed up. After a time in this tense condition, the muscles can go into spasm and are unable to relax at all. It is believed that if you don't exercise regularly, your body is probably more susceptible to the effects of stress than if you are active. Tension builds up faster in muscles that are weak and stiff from lack of exercise.

### **WHAT ARE TRIGGER POINTS?**

When a muscle is always knotted up, blood can't circulate through the tissue to nourish it. Some of the tissue will eventually degenerate and form little nodules called trigger points. These little knots are a source of much of the severe referred pain associated with muscle-strain problems. Once the pain reference pattern of muscle is known, it can be used to locate the muscle that is the source of pain.

### **WHAT IS REFERRED PAIN?**

Trigger points can refer to other parts of the body far removed from its source. If you have a trigger point in your shoulders, for instance, it could be the cause of the pain in your temple. As a matter of fact in examining a trigger point in the muscle, you can press it and feel the pain shooting up to the temple. You know, then, that your head pain actually originates in the shoulder muscles. On the other hand, if you're unaware of the trigger point, you might mistake the throbbing pain on one side of your head for migraine, a common misdiagnosis.

### **HOW SERIOUS ARE TRIGGER POINTS?**

Trigger points can occur anywhere in the body and cause diagnostic havoc wherever they appear. In the shoulders and neck, they cause pain mistaken for migraine headaches. In the buttocks, the discomfort they bring to the back is often confused with spinal disk disorders. Because they don't show up on conventional diagnostic tests, and because most physicians don't examine the muscles for these trigger points, they are perhaps the greatest factor in the misdiagnosis of chronic muscle-contraction pain. Without proper treatment, these knots continue to cause pain that, in turn, makes you more tense and causes the muscle to contract more tightly, leading to more trigger points and more pain.