

Pain and Stress: The Connection

MyoRehab Has Answers



Providing a “Team Approach” to drug-free pain relief for over a quarter of a century

Whatever happened to those aches and pains that followed the car accident or sports injury that occurred years ago? When you stopped feeling the aches and pain after a week or two, did that mean the injury was all gone? The truth is the pain may be gone but the soft tissue of our body (muscle, tendon, ligament, fascia, etc) collectively maintains a record of each and every injury to which it has ever been subjected.

Many times we experience a familiar pain after a simple activity or a stressful day and wonder why. This is the pain due to the reactivation of the injuries, large and small, that our body has recorded. Take Daniel for example. He arrived at MyoRehab for a consult in a forward bent posture complaining of severe low back pain. He explained that all he did was reach down to pick up his newspaper and has been unable to straighten his back since. He said this happens every now and then because he has a “weak back”.

Usually, after an episode of pain and forward bent posture, he waits a week or two and it all “just goes away”. After a brief interview, we discovered Daniel had a long history of what he called minor injuries to his body over the years, his low back in particular. Again, the pain may subside but the record of the injury remains. At forty three, Daniel had accumulated no less than two “minor” car accidents and several sports injuries.

He also remarked that his back pain acted up during times of significant emotional stress and wondered if there was a connection. Yes, there is a stress/pain connection. It is mediated by the sympathetic nervous system which controls the neuro-hormonal stress response commonly known as fight-or-flight. Common stress symptoms include irritability, muscular tension, inability to concentrate and a variety of physical reactions, including headaches and elevated heart rate.

The pain response is directly related to chemistry released in the body during episodes of stress. Stress related chemistry that causes irritability and muscular tension is responsible for reactivating the accumulated record of our many “minor” injuries. How often have you had a stress headache? Or like Daniel, a reoccurring pain in a particular area of your body.

The record of repeated minor injuries can be thought of as a point that when sufficiently stimulated by activity or stress chemistry

will trigger a familiar pain pattern. The most typical pain patterns are shown in the box. The stress headache results from points in the trapezius, an upper back/neck muscle. (Illustration A) This headache producing muscle is responsible for billions of dollars a year spent on pain relievers that provide temporary relief at best.

As with Daniel, the iliopsoas, a muscle on the front of the spine that produces low back pain, is responsible for lost wages by some estimates in the billions of dollars each year. (Illustration B). Often erroneously referred to as a “weak back”, this particular back pain muscle is further injured by turning off the pain signal with pills and employing strengthening exercise. This is nothing less than a recipe for disaster.

Although not as common, stress related shoulder pain does occur. The infraspinatus is a muscle on your shoulder blade. A long history of minor Injury to this muscle (Illustration C) will, over time, produce restricted movement then pain under stress

or following sufficient use. Remember when you were able to reach up between your shoulder blades? If you can’t reach as far, an accumulation of minor injuries to the infraspinatus is already at work, waiting to flare up.

At MyoRehab, therapists will identify and treat all components of your pain complex. During your first visit, a detailed review of your medical history provides insight into factors that have initiated and now perpetuate your pain.

Distortions of the musculoskeletal system are evaluated with standard orthopedic tests and a neurological evaluation. And since each body is unique, a specific postural alignment evaluation combined with range of motion testing form an individualized treatment plan.

Treatments are drug-free and combine a hands-on approach with adjunctive therapies. These may include photo-biostimulation employing FDA approved cold lasers and Frequency Specific Microcurrent which targets specific soft tissue and various pain producing conditions.

The use of your body’s own muscle energy is employed to gently move joints back to a neutral position after issues involving soft tissue are effectively addressed. An individualized home exercise program is developed to maintain the progress gained during treatment.

