

Awareness Often First Step to Relieve Pain

by Derek Metzler

When our bodies begin to trouble us with pain that stops us from doing the things we want to do or enjoying simple pleasures, the first step toward relief may be to simply stop and listen to the body. The John F. Barnes' Myofascial Release Approach (MFR) is a form of manual therapy that often begins by helping patients improve their body awareness.

Pain is the body's way of telling us that something needs our attention. It may be telling us to slow down, rest or give it a break. Pain may signal a need to exercise more appropriately or begin a strengthening program that fits our needs. It may let us know that constant stress is not without consequences or indicate that something more serious is going on within our body and that we should seek medical advice. To become aware of these things, we must first listen.

Many of us have forgotten how to do this. We have tremendous difficulty feeling deeply into certain areas of our own bodies and are often disconnected from them, despite of or in response to experiencing significant pain. Our busy lives have taught us to ignore nagging aches and discomfort, suffering through their noise until it grows louder and louder. Eventually, they capture our attention, but often at a great expense to our well-being. Without body awareness, we cannot make choices that will assist the body in its healing process.

A therapist skilled in Barnes' MFR identifies and treats areas of the connective tissue that have become restricted due to past injury, trauma, surgical scarring or poor postural habits. The gentle and non-forceful nature of MFR gives us permission to feel more deeply into our bodies and become better listeners.

As restrictions in one area of our body begin to release, we will often feel sensations in other areas of the body, known as hearing "the fascial voice". As we learn to listen again, we gain more control over our bodies, allowing for a greater release of tension and muscular holding patterns (ways we habitually hold tension in our bodies). We become aware of the held tension that is contributing to our pain and limitation.

As we begin to feel into stuck places, we can let them go. Pain lessens and physical motion begins to return, bringing with it a new sense of awareness of life's simple pleasures.

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