MYOFASCIAL RELEASE PHYSICAL THERAPY

"*Is this the missing puzzle piece to pain relief?* "

Are you in pain? Whether it is physical, mental, or emotional, we have all experienced some degree of pain. Pain is a part of being human. It is often the only way our body can communicate to us that something has gone array. But, many times, it seems that pain lingers longer than it should. It outlasts its welcome. It may not even make sense. There appears to be no visible evidence for why it should remain. X-rays and CT scans are normal, MRI's are negative. There may or may not have been a precipitating injury, but even if there is; "it has been 2 years since my accident, shouldn't I be pain-free by now?" may be your question.

It is evident that both acute and chronic pain can, at times, be a mystery. Despite all we know about pain, it can continue to baffle us as we seek to find its cause. Is it possible that in that endless search for the cause of pain that we overlooked something just beneath the surface of our skin? The fascia, a tough fibrous connective tissue that attaches our skin to the body and dives deeply in a three dimensional network, may be the answer. This network covers us from head to toe and reaches down into the cellular level. For a more visual image of how the fascia simultaneously connects and divides our body, cut open an orange and observe how the white tissue adheres the peel to the fruit, then in a continuous manner acts to separate each individual wedge. Cut open the wedge and you will see how this same tissue creates the spaces and contains the fluid of the fruit. The fascia in our body operates much the same way. It holds us together. When the fascia is healthy, it gives us a shape that is balanced and stable. Fascia has a structural integrity and resists the everyday forces placed upon our bodies effectively without injury. It is also fluid in nature allowing us freedom of movement and flexibility.

When the fascia is unhealthy, meaning that it has become "restricted" and has lost its fluidity, it has the ability to create a variety of symptoms. Since there is no tissue or system in the body that is not intimately connected to the fascia, when restricted, it can create seemingly bizarre or "unexplainable" patterns of pain, numbness, tingling, aching, burning, or other combinations of sensations. Because it gives us our shape and freedom of movement, restrictions will cause imbalances in pelvic and spinal alignment creating increased pressures on joints, ligaments, and tendons. Postural stress and strain will increase exponentially as the body is in a continuous struggle against gravity. So how does the fascia become restricted?

Restrictions in the fascial system are caused by trauma or injury, poor postural habits, repetitive activity, surgical scarring, sustained emotional holding, such as constant neck tension due to

stress. As the fascial system tightens down, the fluidity is lost and can create crushing pressures on pain sensitive structures such as nerves, blood vessels, intervertebral discs, joints, ligaments, and tendons. It can feel as if our body is gluing itself down. We lose flexibility and we are more prone to continual injury and re-injury.

The good news is that this can be effectively treated and reversed. A well-trained myofascial release therapist can find where the system is restricted through observation of the entire body in standing, sitting, and lying positions. The therapist then uses their skilled sense of touch to locate where the fascial system is in need of release. Once the restriction is located, using their hands in contact with the skin to create gentle, but firm, pressure, the therapist maintains constant tension at the barrier of restriction. This pressure will be maintained for 2-5 minutes (essential "**time element**") until the tissue releases, which usually feels like a gentle elongation much like stretching soft glue that has partially set up. The therapist follows and releases the restrictions throughout the entire body, as most myofascial restrictions are not limited to one region, but continue in zigzag fashion along lines of tension. Therefore, an experienced practitioner will treat the entire body regardless of where the symptoms present themselves. It is a whole body system and often restrictions, distant from the symptoms, can be the originating cause.

Is Myofascial Release the missing puzzle piece for many acute and chronic symptoms that are not resolving as expected with other interventions? It is certainly plausible that the effective treatment for a whole body system, that is often overlooked, could be the missing link. The fascia is vital to healthy movement and balance in the musculoskeletal system. Treating it effectively is essential to helping many people overcome pain and symptoms preventing them from enjoying a quality of life they desire and deserve.

First sidebar:

"The essential "**time element**" has to do with the viscous flow and the piezoelectric phenomenon: a low load (gentle pressure) applied slowly will allow a viscoelastic (fascia) to elongate."
John F. Barnes, PT
MFR ™ www.myofascialrelease.com

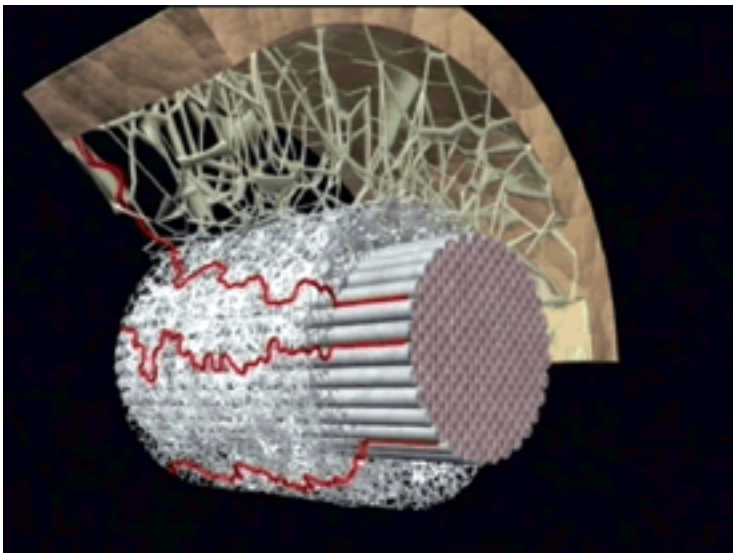

Photo: Dr. J.C. Guimberteau, www.youtube.com ”Strolling Under the Skin.”

Sidebars:

Common Symptoms treated: Head to Toe

Headaches/ migraine or tension
Neck pain/ whiplash
TMJ
Abdominal scarring
Fibromyalgia
Women’s issues
Hiatal Hernia
Carpal tunnel
Scoliosis
Spinal Stenosis

Hip/pelvic/knee pain
Low back pain
Sciatica
Plantar fasciitis

BIO: for featured contributors page

Derek S. Metzler, MPT, Advanced Myofascial Release Practitioner, graduated from University of Pittsburgh with a Master's degree in physical therapy. He used this foundation to springboard into the specialty work of Myofascial Release, MFR ™, training under John F. Barnes, PT. Because of the superior patient outcomes he uses this as his sole modality for treatment of acute and chronic pain issues. He is the owner and practitioner of Restore-PT, located in Richmond.