

Myotherapy

Myotherapy is a form of physical therapy used to treat or prevent soft tissue pain and restricted joint movement caused by muscle or myofascia dysfunction. (Myofascia are the thin, fibrous sheets of tissue that surround and separate muscles. Ligaments and tendons are comprised of bundled myofascia.)

The philosophy of myotherapy is founded on Western medical principles including anatomy, physiology and biomechanics. You don't need a referral from a doctor to make an appointment with a myotherapist.

Symptoms

Pain that is caused by muscle tissue or muscle fascia (myofascia) is called myofascial pain. Symptoms can include:

- Deep and constant aching
- Muscle tightness
- Sore spots in the muscle (myofascial trigger points)
- Reduced joint mobility
- Stiff joints
- Numbness
- Recurrent tingling, prickling or 'pins and needles' sensation
- Unexplained tiredness.

A range of disorders

Myotherapy can be used to treat a wide range of disorders including:

- Overuse injury such as tennis elbow or shin splints
- Some sports injuries
- Tension headache
- Pain caused by poor posture
- Some types of chronic back pain
- Some types of joint pain, such as shoulder impingement syndrome
- Muscle sprains.

What to expect at your first appointment

Take to your first appointment any medical test results (such as x-ray films) that relate to your condition. The myotherapist will ask many questions about your symptoms. Tell the myotherapist about your medical history, including prior illness and surgery. Give them a list of all the medicines you are currently taking. This information is kept in strictest confidence, and is used by the therapist to help pinpoint the cause of your symptoms.

The myotherapist will examine and manipulate the affected joints and associated muscles and test your reflexes. This initial examination is thorough and helps the myotherapist to find out if the symptoms are myofascial. The myotherapist may refer you to other health care professionals for further diagnosis or treatment, depending on your medical condition.

A range of techniques

Treatment depends on the diagnosis. Myotherapy uses a range of techniques including:

- Massage, including sports and remedial techniques
- Gently moving the patient's affected body part through its range of motion (passive stretching)
- Hot or cold therapy
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) therapy
- Trigger point therapy (acupressure)
- Myofascial dry needling (acupuncture).

Most patients with myofascial dysfunction will have pain relief within one to three sessions. Each session typically lasts one hour.

Self-help suggestions

The myotherapist will explain your condition in detail. Dietary changes could be recommended. The myotherapist may advise treatments to use at home including:

- Exercises and stretches specific to your condition
- Self-administered massage
- Heat packs
- Ice packs
- Relaxation techniques including meditation.

Ongoing management

In consultation with you, the myotherapist will identify factors that may be making your condition worse (such as poor posture, scoliosis or overtraining) and help you find ways to avoid or reduce these aggravating factors.

If a factor cannot be changed (for example, arthritis or age-related changes to spinal discs), the myotherapist will devise a pain management program. This may involve referral to other health care practitioners.

For acute or persistent joint pain, always see your doctor.

Finding a practitioner

Suggestions for finding a practitioner include:

- Contact the Australian Association of Massage Therapists and ask for a list of members in your area.
- Ask your doctor or health care practitioner for a referral.
- Ask your friends for word-of-mouth recommendations.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Australian Association of Massage Therapists Tel. 1300 138 872 – for free referral service
- Institute of Registered Myotherapists of Australia Tel. (03) 9418 3913

Things to remember

- Myotherapy is a form of physical therapy used to treat or prevent soft tissue pain and restricted joint movement.
- The philosophy of myotherapy is founded on Western medical principles including anatomy, physiology and biomechanics.
- You don't need a referral from a doctor to make an appointment with a myotherapist.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Association of Massage Therapists (AAMT)

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