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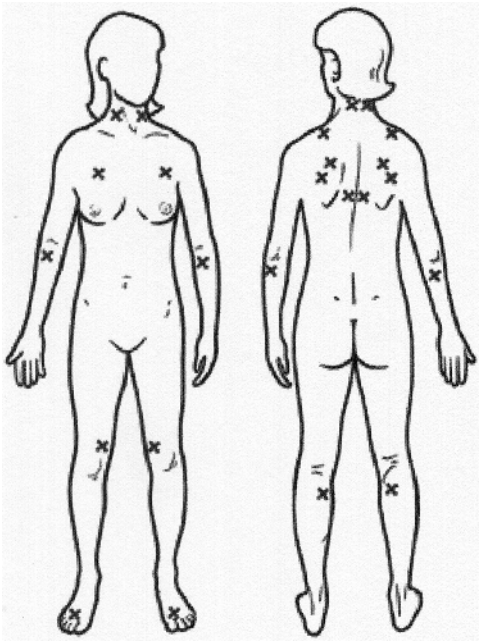
"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Do You Have A Trigger Point?

Of all the potential physical problems that you may be unfortunate enough to experience, the presence of "trigger points" is one that almost all of you will have at one time or more. Trigger points are nasty little localized nodules or hard spots, primarily in muscle tissue. They can occur in almost any muscle in the body and are very difficult to locate and treat to an unskilled practitioner. The reason they are so difficult to address is that the pain you feel is not necessarily at the location of the actual trigger point. Unlike many other muscle injuries, trigger points can cause localized or referred pain even when the affected muscle is at rest or not moving.

Patients who have trigger points often report regional, persistent pain that usually results in a decreased range of motion in that particular muscle. Often, the muscles used to maintain body posture are affected, namely the muscles in the neck, shoulders, back, and pelvic girdle (refer to diagram).

Once a trigger point is located and pressure is applied to it by a finger or thumb, it may cause an intense sharp or dull pain at that spot, as well as in another area of the body. For example, many people come to see me for relief of their headaches. In fact, all they have is a series of trigger points in the muscles of their neck. When I apply pressure to these localized spots, they often feel their typical "headache" pain around their forehead, temples, or eyes. Once these trigger points are eliminated, they no longer experience headaches. Another common example is when trigger points in the shoulder blade and neck region can cause referred pain to be felt down the arm and even into the hand. Many of these people have been mistakenly treated for carpal tunnel syndrome in the past with no relief.



There are several theories on how and why these trigger points occur. Classical scientific research has not had much luck in finding an actual cause that meets their often too strict guidelines. But, like it or not, these trigger points do exist and many misdiagnosed patients are suffering daily as a result. What these researchers have agreed upon is that acute trauma or repetitive trauma at a microscopic level may lead to the development of a trigger point. Acute trauma may include a mild to serious fall, motor vehicle accidents (especially when whiplash has occurred), hip and low back surgeries, and muscle strains. Repetitive trauma may include a lack of exercise, prolonged poor posture, repetitive movements at work or home, chronic physical or emotional stress, and decreased motion in certain joints of the spine and extremities. The most common cause I see in my office is when occupational or recreational activities produce repetitive stress on a specific muscle or muscle group, resulting in chronic stress in muscle fibers, leading to trigger points. Examples of other predisposing activities include holding a telephone receiver between the ear and shoulder to free up your arms; prolonged bending over a table (poor posture); sitting in chairs with poor back support, improper height of chair arm rests or none at all; and lifting heavy items using improper body mechanics.

If you have been experiencing chronic pain with a questionable origin, have a chiropractor examine you. If trigger points are found to be contributing to your symptoms, elimination of them may give you the relief you have been looking for.