

SEARCHING FOR TRIGGER POINTS: TIPS TO CONSISTENTLY RELIEVE PAIN

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17)

If your client has widespread pain, chances are they have some kind of systemic perpetuating factor that needs to be addressed and you will need to refer out to a practitioner who can order laboratory or other tests. During subsequent treatments, you may decide to continue working on the same area before moving onto another symptomatic area, or you may decide that other areas of pain are related and need to be addressed before the primary area of pain can be completely resolved.

Any decrease in intensity and/or frequency of symptoms, or decrease in size of the symptomatic area is an improvement that indicates that you treated at least some of the pertinent trigger points.

Be sure to ask how they felt immediately after the last treatment. If they felt better even for awhile, ask what they were doing when their symptoms returned. Often that is a clue to at least one of their aggravating perpetuating factors and an indication that it needs to be addressed for lasting relief.

STEP FIVE

Next, identify and eliminate perpetuating factors. Trigger points may form after a sudden trauma or injury or they may develop gradually. Common initiating

and perpetuating factors are mechanical stresses, injuries, nutritional problems, emotional factors, sleep problems, acute or chronic infections, and organ dysfunction and disease, though there are many more.

If perpetuating factors aren't identified and treated, your client may improve temporarily, but their symptoms will keep returning. Most clients will have multiple perpetuating factors.

When you buy a trigger point book, make sure it contains extensive sections on perpetuating factors and become very familiar with each factor and its symptoms.

Because resolving these factors are crucial for long-term relief, you need to be familiar with all of the potential perpetuating factors and the symptoms of each. For example, if your client is suffering from fatigue, depression and insomnia, you might suspect anemia or hypothyroidism, and you may need to refer your client to a health care provider who can order laboratory tests.

Even if it is not within your scope of practice to diagnose and treat many of these perpetuating factors, as a massage therapist, it is important you have some ideas of whom you can refer your client to, who can diagnose and treat

particular perpetuating factors that you suspect.

STEP SIX


Learn self-help techniques so you can teach them to your clients, if it is within the scope of your practice. Refer them to books that reinforce self-help techniques for perpetuating factors, pressure techniques and stretches, especially if it is not within the scope of your practice.

Clients who use self-help techniques and eliminate their perpetuating factors get better at least five times faster than those who just have you work on them.

Be careful not to overwhelm your client with too many suggestions; if you give them too many, they likely won't do anything. My recommendation is to recommend to clients no more than two self-help techniques per session, typically one pressure and stretch combination and one perpetuating factor to resolve. Help them find a way they can be successful so they will want to do more. For example, if you think walking would be beneficial for your client, suggesting an hour per day five days per week might be unrealistic for that client. Ask them if they could manage 20 minutes per day for three days per week. At their next visit, ask them how

it went. If they weren't able to do it, find out why and problem-solve with them to see if you can find something they can/will do. Once they feel the benefits, they will likely want to do more. Above all, don't criticize them for failing to follow your suggestions. Keep a problem-solving dialogue going with them to try to find something they can achieve and feel successful.

A PROTOCOL, NOT A TECHNIQUE

While there is a lot of information to learn about trigger points and how they develop in each muscle and manifest symptoms, fortunately there are now several good sets of charts and reference books to choose from. Trigger point continuing education classes are offered around the country, including several 100+ hour programs that teach the full protocol. Learning about trigger points will improve both your assessment skills and your success rate. 

VALERIE DELAUNE is a licensed acupuncturist and certified neuromuscular therapist. DeLaune has authored eleven books on trigger point self-help techniques. DeLaune teaches workshops in the U.S. and currently resides in Alaska. For more information, visit www.triggerpointrelief.com.