

ARTICLE: "Trigger Points—Painful Little Nuisances"

This week we are going to talk about something which is extremely bothersome for some patients and something that can be readily treated. The topic??? Trigger points in the muscles. Trigger points are ischemic (lacking oxygen) and contracting (static chronic contraction) of musculature which results in a "knot" in the muscle. They can occur in many areas however trigger points generally occur near the external rotators of the hip, the extensors of the neck and back as well as external rotators and abductors of the shoulders.

Trigger points can also occur in the paraspinal muscles of the cervical, thoracic and lumbar spine. Trigger points are a response to poor postural control, prolonged stress, a feedback loop of external stress and also are a response to other injuries.

Trigger points can be successfully treated through a variety of techniques. In physical therapy we use trigger point release which is essentially light pressure on the points which releases the tension in the muscle via the gamma bias in the myotatic reflex arc. This is a reflex in which pressure on the muscle causes reflexive relaxation of the muscle. The gamma bias is essentially like a thermostat for muscle contraction and by pressing on the receptors, the gamma bias is turned down.

The other school of thought regarding trigger point release techniques is that pressure on the muscle causes blood to rush to the area increasing and saturating it with blood enriched oxygen decreasing the ischemic (oxygen starved) component of the trigger points.

Another technique for treatment of trigger points is trigger point dry needling. Using a needle to elicit a contraction of the muscle causes it to reflexively relax and subsequently the trigger point is reduced. Trigger point dry needling is a technique which is performed particularly when the trigger points are pervasive and resistant to other forms of treatment. During trigger point dry needling, an acupuncture needle is inserted into the muscle causing it to contract and subsequently the muscle is reflexively relaxed. Additionally substance P, a pain mediating chemical is diminished via the needle and some of the pain emanating from the trigger point is remediated.

As you can see trigger points are a nuisance and can be treated with thermal agents such as US, heat or ice, pressure such as in the case of trigger point release and trigger point dry needling. When patient's find an treatment which is effective, this can be

translated into a home program to continue the appropriate treatment device. A home trigger point tool called a back knobber is something that is readily available on the internet and can be used to press on trigger points in order to relieve them.

Trigger points should not be confused with tender points which are points of muscular tenderness which are present with fibromyalgia and other conditions and typically do not respond in the same manner. Tender points typically have a different mode of release and can often be aggravated treating them as a trigger point.

As you can see trigger points can be problematic for many patients. If you or someone you know has a problem with trigger points in the muscle, they can also have problems with backaches, headaches and facial pain as a result. For more information on trigger points and how to treat them, make an appointment for a no cost consultation screening at our office. Thank you.