

IS YOUR SELF-ESTEEM GIVING YOU A PAIN IN THE NECK?

I have been a practicing Remedial Massage Therapist for over six years and have recently become a Member of The Association of Osteomyologists. "What's that?" you ask. Well, 'osteo' denotes bone and 'myo' denotes muscle, so my work involves assessing and treating muscular and skeletal problems with a combination of deep tissue / remedial massage, pure relaxation massage and where appropriate, gentle skeletal manipulation.

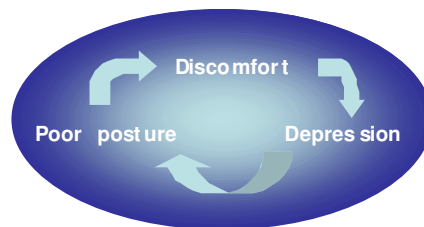
I see people with sports and mechanical injuries, back problems, stress, M.S., M.E., poor circulation, constipation, headaches/migraines, nervous troubles, osteo-arthritic pain, oedema, those recovering from illness and stroke victims. One belief that I see reinforced time and again is that we are 'whole' (holistic) entities with all our senses and body systems integrated. Imbalance in just one of those systems and the whole body starts to show the effects. In other words: how somebody feels physically, can effect how they feel mentally, emotionally and even spiritually. People suffering from long-term, chronic pain and or physical difficulty can become depressed and withdrawn. Living with pain on a daily basis is exhausting on many levels.

Conversely the same is true: how we feel emotionally, mentally and spiritually can effect how we feel physically. Stress can aggravate existing conditions such as asthma and eczema. It can make us feel, or perceive pain more acutely, as our coping mechanisms are more stretched. It has been shown to be one of the causes of Irritable Bowel Syndrome and it can elevate blood pressure.

Stress and depression manifest themselves in many ways and can present different symptoms: headaches, irritability, poor concentration, sleeplessness, lethargy and fatigue. All of these can have a 'knock-on' effect on posture: when we are tired or down we tend to slouch and poor self-esteem can show in our posture and body language too: hunched, rounded shoulders, bowed head, folded arms and legs and lack of eye contact - as if we are trying to sink into ourselves, 'battening down the hatches'.

In my line of work, reading posture and body language are tremendously important in giving me an insight into whether the patient's complaint is purely physical, (say a shoulder injury brought on by too many weights down the gym, or a whiplash injury), or whether there is some underlying stress or possibly a self-esteem problem that is causing or exacerbating the pain. (It is important at this point to add that poor posture can be a result of other circumstances too. It could be a congenital condition (one present at birth), or the result of a fall or other trauma, or as something that has developed habitually through an individual's work or lifestyle.)

Poor posture means that all the joints of the body are more susceptible to restriction and strain; your vital organs have less space and so work less efficiently; the body's muscles operate less efficiently and so more energy has to be used to maintain balance and last but by no means least, we don't look good when we slouch! It can be one of the contributory causes of back, neck and shoulder pain, and can be responsible for one of the most insidious vicious circles I can think of:



You can start at any part of this circle and it still carries on. This might not be true for everybody, but it is undoubtedly true for a great many of the clients I have seen over the years.

So what's the answer? Well, everybody's different, but here are a few little tips I hope will help.

- Try and walk proud and walk tall. Lift your rib cage out of your stomach, so straightening your spine and alleviating strain on the muscles of the mid back area.
- Imagine you have a piece of thread running right the way up your spine and through the crown of your head. Imagine this being pulled up. This will elongate the neck and allow the chin to retract slightly, taking the strain off the muscles at the back of the neck and the top of the shoulders.
- Don't stick your nose in the air and don't force your shoulders back; stay relaxed. Tuck your bottom in.
- Don't worry if you find yourself slipping back into old ways, you are changing habits of a life time and re-educating your body; it's impossible to remember all the time (though clients have found it useful to stick post-it notes all over the house, car and office in order to remind themselves!).

If you experience discomfort with any of the above, it may be advisable to seek advice from your G.P., or see a registered Osteomyologist, Osteopath, Chiropractor or Physiotherapist. You may need some sort of remedial treatment to become more comfortable.

I can't emphasise enough how important it is to try and take responsibility for your own recovery. Your therapist can only do so much. Be aware of how you stand and sit; heaven knows we all slouch from time to time, but try not to let it become the 'norm'. If you find yourself in a stressful situation, try and find a coping mechanism, such as taking slow, deep breaths to calm the flow of adrenaline. Use positive visualisation to 'see' yourself looking and feeling healthy and feeling in control of your life every day. Think as positively as you can at all times and about all aspects of your life. Book a relaxing massage and if you find it helpful, go regularly; they really are so good for you in so many ways.

Try and think about your body language and what kind of signals you send out.

If you look like a victim, people will treat you as such; if you are aggressive, people will either be aggressive back, or they will retreat completely from you. By modifying your body language slightly: using non-aggressive eye contact, unfolding your arms and legs and holding your head up, you will probably appear more confident and approachable, even if you don't feel it. All of these things may seem difficult to use to start with, but practice will make them easier and eventually they will become completely natural to you.

Most of all, love yourself, be gentle with yourself (nobody's perfect) and relax!



Victoria Higginson M.A.O.
Osteomyologist
Association Of Osteomyologists
Dip. Massage. Dip. Manipulative Sc.
Federation of Holistic Therapists.
Contact telephone 07967 304237