

Massage .. more than just symptoms.

By David Hall, Qualified Massage Therapist

One of the common themes in all my articles on massage is that in trying to fix muscle or joint aches and pains, the therapist should always try to look at the “big picture” of the problem.

In other words, don't only treat the SYMPTOM - where you're feeling sore or tight - but also consider if there may be other factors causing or contributing to that symptom in the first place.

Naturopaths and homeopathic practitioners also take a more holistic approach and it is why they have such a high success rate with homeopathic and other natural remedies for a variety of ailments.

Symptom Meaning.

The word “symptom” comes from a Greek word meaning “something that falls together with something else.” So “symptoms” are a signal or sign of a problem elsewhere.

Therefore, treating the symptom doesn't necessarily change that “something else.” If you cut your finger with a knife, it bleeds and may start to throb after awhile. It is fairly obvious what has caused the pain.

But if, for example, you have a generalised pain or tightness in your lower back or shoulders, these are often just **symptoms** of other problems - like, tightness, weakness or inflexibility in muscles elsewhere in the body, or perhaps even a disk prolapse.

Headaches are good examples of being symptomatic of other problems, like stress. Talk to different people with headaches and even their symptoms are often very different.

One person has pain in the back of the head, while another may experience it in the front or side. In some people, the headache is worse when they move, in others it hurts more when they lie down. Some sufferers use ice packs, while others find a heat pack helps relieve their headache.

But if you question these people further you may find some also have a backache or sore neck, some could have digestive problems, suffer dizziness or a sore throat - or any number of other ailments.



Just taking an aspirin may relieve the immediate headache, but what about the other problem? Is the headache just a symptom of a more serious ailment that also needs to be remedied?

Competent and qualified remedial massage therapists who take this “big picture” approach can often fix or alleviate muscle or joint aches and pains where other health care practitioners have failed.

In fact, massage therapists may need to work deep into muscles in other areas of your body you never even suspected as being part of the problem.

Pain to fix pain.

Deep tissue work can cause some pain. But why cause pain to fix pain?

If you accept the concepts and principles of homeopathic medicine, it is easier to understand how a small amount of physical discomfort - well within an individual's pain tolerances - can actually help reduce pain and produce remarkable results for muscle and joint problems even without using any form of medicines or drugs.

Relaxed.

A remarkable side-effect of deep tissue remedial massage is that, despite any pain, at the end of the treatment the patient usually feels wonderfully relaxed and could easily go home and fall asleep. So stress levels are also reduced.

But how does inflicting some pain through deep pressure in tight muscles help to cure or relieve muscular aches and pains?

One way is that a certain level of pain will trigger the desired response from the brain to release endorphins and other chemicals that then help the muscles relax. At the end of a massage, it is likely the body has been flooded with these substances,

making you feel totally relaxed.

Using deep pressure, a remedial massage therapist also stretches tight muscles to make them more loose and flexible and to release toxins. The massage also helps the circulation of vital blood and oxygen into the muscles and throughout the body.

As mentioned earlier, muscular or joint pain in one area of the body may be just a SYMPTOM of a different problem elsewhere.

For example, pain in the knee may be the result of lateral (sideways tilt) imbalances in the hip that then cause uneven tension in inner and outer thigh muscles that continue across the knee, pulling it out of balance.

Consequences.

For a person heavily involved in ADF physical fitness activities or sports like running or football, these imbalances may eventually have serious consequences and possibly lead to injury like torn ligaments or damage to the meniscus due to the whole knee structure being weakened or worn.

Pain in the knee might also initially stem from nerves being impinged by tight muscles in the lower back, hip or buttocks.

If all the muscles involved are not loosened or balanced, it is likely the knee pain will continue. In this example, a competent massage therapist also would treat muscles which mobilise or stabilise the hip, lower back, spine and buttocks, as well as working on muscles which go across the knee.

There are many other examples where common muscle and joint aches and pains are often just a SYMPTOM of tight muscles elsewhere. Just working on the symptoms will usually provide only short term relief.

Homeopathy ... Respecting the Wisdom of the Body.

Homeopathy is a medical approach that respects the wisdom of the body.

It uses medicines that stimulate the body's own immune and defence systems to start the healing process. This approach individualises medicines according to the totality of the person's physical, emotional and mental symptoms.

Too often, doctors and patients both assume a person's symptoms ARE the disease and treating these symptoms is the best way to cure.

But this approach often is like taking the battery out of a smoke alarm after it detects smoke. It will stop the noise from the smoke alarm, but it won't put out the fire.

A growing number of doctors and other health practitioners now recognise that symptoms are actually efforts by the body to deal with stress or infection.

These practitioners see symptoms as defences of the body that attempt to protect and heal itself, rather than just viewing symptoms as signs of the body's breakdown.

For example, research has shown that fevers are the body's effort to try to heal itself. Fever usually accompanies bacterial or viral infection, but the research indicates the body prepares itself to resist infection by creating a fever. It is then more able to produce interferon (an anti-viral substance).

Fever also increases white blood cell mobility and activity, instrumental factors in fighting infection. (There are, of course, times when a fever gets so high it can cause serious, long term damage to a person's health. Homeopathic practitioners recognise this and prescribe accordingly.)

Many conventional drugs are prescribed by doctors specifically to control or suppress symptoms. As a result, these drugs may well inhibit the body's immune and defensive processes.

It is accepted knowledge that when taken in overdose, every plant, mineral and chemical substance causes its own unique set of physical, emotional and mental symptoms.

Also readily acknowledged is that individuals, when ill, have their own particular physical, emotional and mental symptom patterns, even when different people have the same disease.

Homeopathic medicine is a natural pharmaceutical science in which a practitioner seeks to find a substance/s which would cause, in overdose, similar symptoms to those a sick person is experiencing. (There is already a vast database of knowledge about these treatments).

When the match is made, that substance is then given in very small, safe doses, often with dramatic effects.

Homeopaths define the underlying principle for this matching process as the "law of similars." Even conventional medicine uses many of these principles, for example immunisations and anti-venenes.

Why is radiation used to treat cancer when radiation is known to cause cancer? Why is snake venom used to create anti-venenes? Why are diseases used to create their own vaccine?

Modern allergy treatment, likewise, takes the homeopathic approach of using small doses of allergens in order to create an antibody response.

If you'd like to know more about massage therapy, call one of our qualified therapists today.

