

Mind Body Connection

Try Reducing Pain the Natural Way

By Andrea Metcalf, CPT, PES

Joint pain is something that almost everyone has experienced. It is important to understand that joint pain can occur when the bones of the body come in close proximity to each other. This may result when a continued pattern of movement shifts the joint space due to a stronger muscle pulling on the joint in a certain direction. When this occurs, the body will produce fluid to keep the bones from touching. This inflammatory response not only produces pain but a limited range of motion too.

The most common joint pain complaints concern the back, knee, shoulder and neck areas. One of the best methods to reduce pain naturally is to follow a three step process which includes: stretching, increasing circulation and strengthening exercises. By keeping the muscles pulling on the joint in balance, you can prevent injury, reduce and possibly eliminate the pain completely.

Back Pain

According to the American Chiropractic Association, back pain costs Americans around \$15 billion

per year, for medical care and disability payments. Recent surveys report, "thirty-one million Americans have lower back pain at any given time" and as much as, "one half of all working Americans admit to having back pain symptoms each year." Some experts estimate that as many as 80% of all of us will experience a back problem at some time in our lives.

Some common causes of back pain include: tightness in hip flexors, weak core muscles that support the spine and the back side, as well as muscle imbalances. Other causes include: long periods of sitting or standing, weak pelvic stability and repetitive forward motions.

A few simple stretches can relieve discomfort by bringing increased blood flow to the area and re-establishing length patterns:

Back Stretch Start on the floor on your back and bring your knees into your chest rolling the tailbone up towards the ceiling. While stretching, it is important to breathe deeply and relax the shoulders while lengthening the back of the neck. Then slowly reach one leg out and hold the knee to chest. Keep the toe pointing upward on the extended leg

and try to rest the heel on the floor. Now bring the knee across the body and open the hips and lower back. Perform this same series on the other side. Each stretch can be held for 30 seconds to 2 minutes.

The next step to a pain free back side is to strengthen the supporting muscles of the joint, particularly the spine:

Strengthening Exercise Bridge Roll Up: Lying on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor; slowly roll the hips upward leading with the tailbone and drawing in the abdominals. Raise the hips until the weight is in the upper rib cage and shoulder blades of the back; pause at the top of this movement and then slowly lower the spine one vertebrae at a time to the floor. You should feel this on the back side of the thighs and butt. Pelvic Tilt: Perform like a roll up but keep the rib cage on the floor and the natural curve of the lower back flattened into the floor. Both of these exercises should be practiced everyday for 20-30 repetitions.

Knee Pain

Research published by The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons provides that: about 60% of all runners are injured in an average year, and about one-third of those misfortunes occur at the knee, producing a yearly knee injury rate of one in five runners.

Knee pain is an extremely common complaint, and there are many causes: muscle imbalances from repetitive motions, obesity, Q angle of the hips (which is the relationship to pelvis width and upper thigh placement in relation to lower leg placement), weak muscles, poor mechanics due to these weak muscles, prior injury and trauma incidents such as, falling or being hit.

The front of our thighs develop better strength than the back does because we primarily move in a forward motion. When muscle imbalances occur, as with the spine, the joint to which they surround may move out of its prime alignment thus resulting in bones touching. Again, the body will take the necessary steps to signal this is happening with pain.

Simple Stretch The IT Band Cross: Standing with one foot behind the other; lean over toward base leg; you are stretching the leg that is behind. The IT band is a band of connective tissue starting from the hip that follows down the leg and attaches below the knee just outside the knee.

Strengthening Exercises

Bridge Curls on Ball: Perform on floor with feet on ball – the Bridge Roll Up listed in the back section, which works the hamstrings and gluteals (bum) may also be used. **Leg Extensions with Ball:** Place ball between feet and hands under hips; extend legs. **Single Leg Stand Ups:** With your seat higher than knee height; slowly stand up.

Shoulder Pain

About 6 million people in the U.S. seek medical care each year for shoulder pain; one reason why is because we use our arms for so many common activities. Muscle imbalances from repetitive motions, over rotation and stress induced discomfort high in our shoulders, are standard reasons for shoulder pain.



Problems with the "rotator cuff", where a group of four tendons attach four shoulder muscles to the upper arm, are one of the most common complaints heard.

Stretching Exercise Arm Circles: Perform with weights, gallons of milk or water bottles, in each hand.

Strengthening Exercises Open the Book: Standing with an exercise tube at elbow height, pull hands open as if you were opening a book. Reverse Front Raises: Put back of hands together with thumbs down and raise arms from chest to eyes with light weights or water bottles in hand. Wide "V" Raises: With thumbs up, arms open and shoulder blades down, squeeze shoulders together.

Neck Pain

That pain in your neck cannot only be nagging but also cause headaches. Poor posture certainly contributes to neck pain, as well as, repetitive motions and stress in the high shoulder area.

Simple Stretches Side Head Stretch: Standing with arm extended to side, lean head to opposite shoulder using three different hand positions: fingers up, back and then downward. Long Arm Stretch: Stand with arm extended to front and thumb turned outward; stretch fingers toward forearm.

Strengthening Exercises Posture Perfect: Pull chin downward and lower shoulders.

Shoulder Squeezes: Standing "tall", clasp hands behind back and squeeze shoulder blades together.

All exercises can be performed for 30 – 60 seconds; remember to breathe throughout each movement.

Keep in mind these natural alternatives should not be used as a substitution for seeing a doctor, nor may they be suitable for chronic pain with swelling. As always, the rule of thumb is to use common sense at all times.



In addition to penning *Mind Body Connection* for CWM, Andrea Metcalf has also appeared in national publications such as *MORE Magazine*, *Self and Women's World* to name a few. Her expertise has also been called upon frequently as a contributing expert on CLTV, WGN, CNN Headline Newsmakers, *iVillage in the Loop* and the *Today Show*. Adding to her weekly "Wednesday Workout" segments as a member of the NBC5 Fitness Team in Chicago, Andrea can also be seen on *FIT TODAY*, the show she created and produced, on CLTV every weekend morning throughout the Chicago area. She can be contacted through her company, mbc Fitness, at 630-493-3000 or online at: www.mbcfitness.com. —CWM

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