



CAROLE CAPLIN

— DO YOU NEED — THERAPY?

Our holistic lifestyle guru champions the new-wave physiotherapy which takes a multi-pronged approach to pain

There's a common misconception that physiotherapists don't treat spines, and that they are the poor relation to osteopaths and chiropractors in regards to successfully treating skeletal issues. I must admit to being guilty of having thought similarly to the latter.

Having 95 percent rehabbed my right shoulder after a nasty fall a year ago, I still had some residual restrictions, so I decided to try Clare Spencer, a physiotherapist who works with top athletes. Clare is a sports and spinal specialist and has a reputation for getting excellent results. Having experience in all areas of physiotherapy, including trauma and orthopedics, neurology, neuromusculoskeletal outpatients, spinal clinics, intensive care and professional sport, backs and necks now make up 80 percent of her work.

Clare is part of a new wave of physios in that she incorporates corrective exercise therapy, manual therapy (mobilisation and manipulation), physio-specific Pilates, dry needling and traditional acupuncture along with postural correction and ergonomic advice. Clare chose physio because it is evidence-based and involves clinical reasoning (the thinking behind the practice). It is an interesting way to link the biology of how the

human body functions to how we move, and how the mind can influence all of this.

Making a full assessment is key to Clare's method and it involves taking into account a person's full past medical history, the onset of their symptoms, the patient's social history (occupation/hobbies/day-to-day life), medication and relevant investigations (X-rays or scans). Clare is also keen to find out the person's thoughts and beliefs about the pain presentation.

Next follows a full mechanical assessment to find the root cause of the symptoms. Clare examines joint range of motion, muscle strength and length, neural tension, balance, proprioception (awareness of where the body is in space) and any relevant special tests. Finally and most importantly is the palpation of the tissues and joints.

It is much better to be proactive than reactive – keeping fit, flexible and strong to avoid the manifestation of dysfunctions. Clare made a really good point: we see it as the norm to have regular dental checks every six months to a year, but this is never suggested or considered to be the norm for the functional workings of our bodies. Your dentist is trying to pick up problems before they

arise and it would be proactive to do this for our bodies. The added stress and pressure we put ourselves through, be it sitting at a desk for eight hours solid, experiencing stress from day-to-day life or signing up for an Ironman triathlon... over time if there is a mechanical imbalance this is likely to create dysfunctions which eventually manifest as pain.

After examining my shoulder Clare informed me that I had a weak tendon which was causing an imbalance in the movement of the ball and socket (glenohumeral joint). This was affecting the normal smooth mechanics in my shoulder and causing pain on certain movements. In response to the pain in my shoulder the muscles in my neck were working over time "to try and help out" and support the area. This muscle spasm itself can hurt as it causes the release of lactic acid which contributes to the painful experience.

Clare explained that symptoms can be worse when we are under stress as tension can creep into our muscles. The spinal musculature is most vulnerable to this, especially the neck muscles as this is where most of us hold tension. If these are tight it can then alter the mechanics in our shoulders leading to dysfunction and pain. This is largely due to the fascia which is a connective tissue that runs like a helix through the body connecting all our structures.

Clare did a combination of release work including manual therapy, myofascial release/massage, acupuncture and dry needling, alongside giving me some bespoke corrective exercises to help restore normal movement. This involved stretching out and releasing the tight tissues in my shoulder and neck and working on specific strengthening work for the weak rotator cuff shoulder muscle which had been torn.

EASTERN WISDOM

Using an integrated approach...

TCM AND ACUPUNCTURE

This is treatment based on the Chinese model of meridians and the flow of energy (chi). Meridians are channels of energy that run through the body. There are 12 in total and each is linked to an organ. In TCM it is believed that if there is a blockage in one of these meridians, this is when you experience your symptom (for example, pain).

The treatment involves inserting fine acupuncture needles into specific points along these meridians. This restores energy flow within the body and reduces tension, stress and pain.



Your Body | NO MORE PAIN



The more recent scientific explanation is that needling the acupuncture points stimulates the nervous system to release chemicals in the muscles, spinal cord and brain. These chemicals (endorphins, for example) will either change the experience, or they will trigger the release of other chemicals and hormones, which influence the body's own internal regulating system.

DRY NEEDLING (trigger point needling)
It's possible to palpate (feel) and find knots in tight, tough tissues; these knots are known as trigger points. When needles are effectively inserted into these points in the muscle they release, and thus enable the restoration of normal mechanics in joints and a reduction in pain. It is an excellent way of releasing tight structures as the needles are more specific and go deeper

than traditional massage and myofascial release does.

Dry needling brings to the table instant results as this technique restores the glide of the tissues and makes subsequent physio techniques more effective as the tissues are more pliable. This mechanical effect and release of tissues with an acupuncture needle has been proved on ultrasound scanning.

The combination of traditional Chinese medicine points and dry needling together help target the emotional and physical side to pain to help restore balance and wellbeing in the body and also reduce tension in the tissues. The improved energy and biochemical balance produced by acupuncture also stimulates the body's natural healing abilities.

Relaxation was also key in the treatment which is where the acupuncture comes in; it aids relaxation and has a mechanical effect on the tissues to release any tight spots by what we call trigger point needling or dry needling.

So whether you use a physio, osteopath or other professional, finding the right level of expertise and seeing the process through will teach to think very differently about your body, how you move it, deal with pain, hold your posture and much more. You may have to try a combination of practitioners in order to find a really skilled one but it will be more than worth it when you land.

PAIN-BUSTING TIPS

Always be wary of anything that promises quick fixes where pain, injury and dysfunction are concerned. Commitment is essential in order to obtain the required long-term changes in tissues. The risk of not fixing the underlying dysfunction means recurrence of problems are likely as the tissues over time will tighten again, becoming dysfunctional and causing pain.

Be realistic: You need three months of regular stretching to properly stretch out a tight tissue. It takes at least six weeks to improve muscle strength. If there is pain there is likely to be weakness due to pain inhibition – this is where muscles reduce their activity as they cannot function well when hurting, therefore the muscles become weak which promotes more pain.

Breathing: It is crucial to adopt the correct breathing technique in order to calm the nervous system down. Not everyone has the thoracic expansion capability to allow for good quality breathing. So make sure that this is checked in your assessment.

Pain killers: In the initial stages to help get people's symptoms under control pain relief is extremely beneficial. Take as advised by the pharmacist or your doctor. It's essential to take the edge of pain, as it stops the body from having to compensate and therefore helps restore its normal biomechanics. This then gives a window to start a graded exercise programme and physio treatment. As the pain settles, the medication then can be reduced and then stopped.

Inflammation: Do not underestimate how inflammatory substances in food and beverages can greatly exacerbate and spark off inflammation at the site of your issue.

Carole is a pioneer of a holistic approach to health, exercise and wellbeing at the Bowskill Clinic. Visit bowskillclinic.com. If you have a question for Carole, email carole@coolhealth.co.uk

