

Chronic Pain from Muscle Imbalances

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If you suffer from chronic pain, you're not alone; approximately one third of Americans have the same medical condition. Not only can chronic pain be debilitating, it can also have a negative impact on your social and psychological wellbeing. Pain is your body's way of signaling that something is wrong, so don't ignore it! If you're experiencing chronic pain, the licensed Physical Therapists at Humpal Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine Centers may be able to help you reduce and better manage your persistent pain.

The Basics of Chronic Pain

While acute pain is short-lived and often easy to manage, chronic pain persists for months and can even last for years if not treated properly. There are a variety of chronic pain conditions including headache, low back pain, neck pain, arthritis pain, cancer pain and neuropathic pain, among many others. Many of these chronic pain conditions stem from a previous injury or illness; however, others have no specific cause.

There are various treatment options for chronic pain sufferers including traditional medical management which involve pain relievers, antidepressants, anticonvulsants and/or opioids. However, before you consider long term pharmacological use, there are a number of effective conservative treatment options that you may want to try first such as exercise, physical therapy, nerve stimulation and psychological therapy. A multi-modal approach to chronic pain is always best.

The Role of Muscle Imbalance in Chronic Pain

Your body is a masterpiece that consists of an array of muscles that are attached to the joints throughout your body. For optimal functionality of your body, there needs to be a balance of muscle length and strength between opposing muscles that are attached to surround the joints. In most cases, people transition from childhood with fairly neutral posture wherein our muscles and connective tissue are nicely balanced and we can move well.



As the years pass and our work and home lives become more habitual and activities more repetitive, we can start to experience postural adaptations that leave us unbalanced. Daily activities such as lifting groceries, picking up your child, sitting at a computer all day can lead to muscle imbalances. This imbalance means that the muscles and connective tissue on one side of your body may be short and tight, while the other side is long and weak, for example. Over time, this type of imbalance will affect your movement while performing your daily activities leading to your entire body struggling to adapt. If the imbalance isn't properly addressed it can lead to discomfort and loss of performance, which may progress to chronic pain. Having a postural assessment by the Physical Therapists at Humpal Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine Centers can be of tremendous value in helping you understand the role posture may be playing in your muscular imbalance and preventing chronic pain. They can then create an individualized program to help you restore your natural balance and mobility.

Simple Exercises to Avoid Muscle Imbalances

The licensed Physical Therapists at Humpal Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine Centers suggest performing a few simple exercises at home to help correct common muscle imbalances:

- Chin Tuck – this exercise will help to restore muscle balance in your neck and upper back. In a seated or lying position, relax your jaw and tuck your chin in toward your neck. Hold this position for 10 seconds and then relax. Repeat 10 times.
- Doorway Chest Stretch – this exercise will help to restore muscle balance in your upper back, arms and chest. Stand to the side of a doorway with one arm lifted to shoulder height and bent at the elbow. Place the forearm on the doorframe (fingers pointing to the ceiling) and lean forward through the door until you feel a stretch in your chest and shoulder. Hold this position for 60 seconds or more and then relax. Repeat the exercise with the other arm.
- Scapular Stabilization – In a standing or seated position, with elbows bent to 90 degrees, drop your shoulders away from your ears and pull your shoulder blades together. Hold this position for 5 seconds and then relax. Repeat 10 times.
- Squat – this exercise will help to restore muscle balance in your core and legs. Stand straight with your feet shoulder width apart and your arms out in front. While contracting your abdominal muscles, bend your knees, hips and ankles into a squat position and hold for 3 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
- Basic Bridge – this exercise will help to restore balance in your gluteals, pelvis and low back. Lie on the floor with your knees bent and contract your gluteal muscles and pull your hips from the floor. Hold this position for 5 seconds. Repeat the process 5 times.

Tips for your Work out

If you regularly work out, the licensed Physical Therapists at Humpal Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine Centers have a few tips to help prevent a muscle imbalance:

- Perform exercises unilaterally so that your strong side doesn't take over.
- Work out each side with the same weight; performing to the strength of your weak side.
- Work out all muscle groups.
- Ensure that you are performing all exercises using proper form.

Fixing Muscle Imbalances

The good news is that if your chronic pain is being caused by a muscle imbalance, this condition doesn't have to be permanent.

The licensed Physical Therapists at Humpal Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine Centers can assess your condition and develop a treatment plan that will set you on the right track towards a balanced body with less pain. Give Humpal Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine Centers a call today to get started.

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