

Myofascial Trigger Points

Shoulder muscles are the most often muscle group affected by trigger points.

~ Dr. Travell and Simons, M.D.

Imagine this: you feel a deep, radiating pain at your right shoulder. It feels better after a good night's rest, but as your work day progresses, the knot-like feeling creeps upon you without invitation. The pain is sometimes very intense and sometimes moderate. And you note that sometimes it can travel and radiate to different areas of your body.

The above scene is all too common for the average person. These annoying little knots in our muscles and connective tissues are called myofascial trigger points. The "myo" part of the word stands for muscle and the "fascial" part for connective tissues. There are 2 basic types of trigger points: active and latent. **Active** trigger points present with a focused pain in a muscle and usually refer pain in a characteristic pattern. For example, the trigger points in the trapezius muscles on the tops of your shoulders are among the leading causes of tension headaches. Likewise, there is another muscle in your buttocks called piriformis that refers pain just like sciatica does. **Latent** trigger points are silent and stealthy, just like a snake in the grass waiting for its prey. They are clinically non-symptomatic, unless they become triggered and awakened by stress or injury.

All in all, myofascial trigger points keep their victims from going about the daily activities of life. They are the primary source of many musculoskeletal conditions. The good news is, your Massage Therapist knows how to treat these knots better than almost any other health professional.

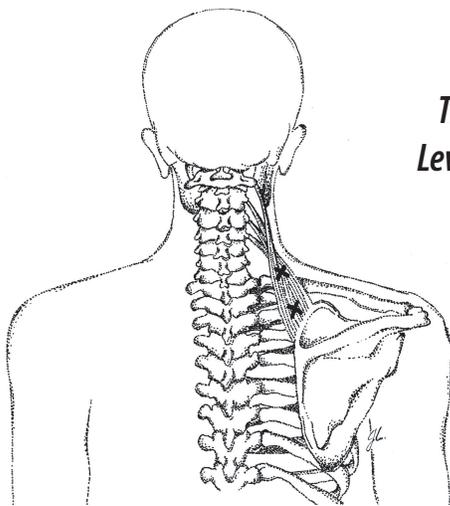


Figure A. Levator scapula trigger points

The levator scapula muscle is responsible for elevating your shoulder blade. To help relax the muscle, improve your postural mindfulness of the shoulder area. Use deep breathing exercises and let go of the tension with each out breath.

Trigger Points in the Levator Scapula muscle

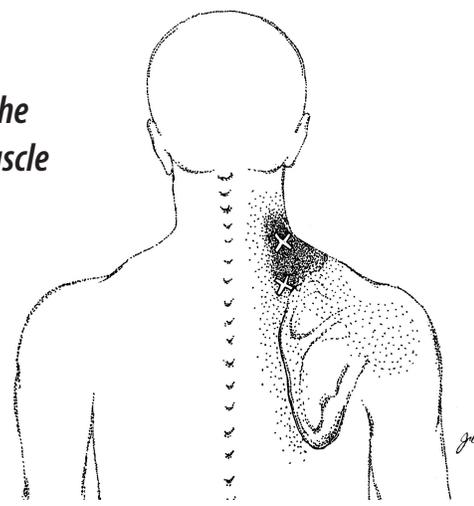


Figure B. Levator scapula pain referral

People who suffer from trigger points in their levator scapula muscle commonly complain of having a "stiff neck". Take a look at the pain referral indicated in the above illustration.

Cont'd on reverse side...

Myofascial Trigger Points (Cont'd)

All The Right Points

Massage Therapists undergo hundreds of hours in hands-on training to treat and prevent myofascial trigger points. Whether you've got them in your shoulders, neck, back or arm, it doesn't matter. Rest assured that your MT will find them with ease and bring them to rest.

The current body of knowledge in the subject area of trigger points was revolutionized by Dr. Travell and Dr. Simons. They have mapped out the entire muscular anatomy and standardized a pain referral pattern for each muscle. And while it is true that a classic trigger point commonly adheres to their research, experience demonstrates that some people present with atypical pain patterns. Nonetheless, the treatment approach is always the same.

One of the most effective treatment approaches that therapeutic massage utilizes with trigger points is called "ischemic compression". After locating the knot, direct pressure is applied (within your comfort level) producing the symptom of pain. You may feel the pain locally or you may feel it radiate and travel away from the area being pressed. You will then be instructed to focus, breathe and relax into the area being pressed until the pain subsides. Next, your therapist will slowly increase the pressure until the pain returns. This process may be repeated for a few minutes, followed by an application of deep moist heat and stretching of the muscle.

Massage therapy is absolutely amazing when it comes to treating trigger points. Many people needlessly suffer in pain for years without the knowledge that a few focused sessions in trigger point therapy can resolve their pain (for life!). That being said, there is an old saying "if you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got". Therefore, to ensure that your trigger points stay away it may be necessary to change your exercise and lifestyle habits. (Talk to your MT about this, too!)

Trigger points are found most commonly in muscles involved in postural support.

~ Colin Outram, RMT

Levator Scapula Home Stretch

This example shows how to stretch your right levator scapula muscle. From a seated neutral position: stabilize your right hand, turn your head 45° to the opposite side (left), grasp the back of your head and allow the weight of your arm to gently flex and press down your chin to the opposite armpit. Hold the stretch for at least 30 seconds; breathe and relax into the muscle.

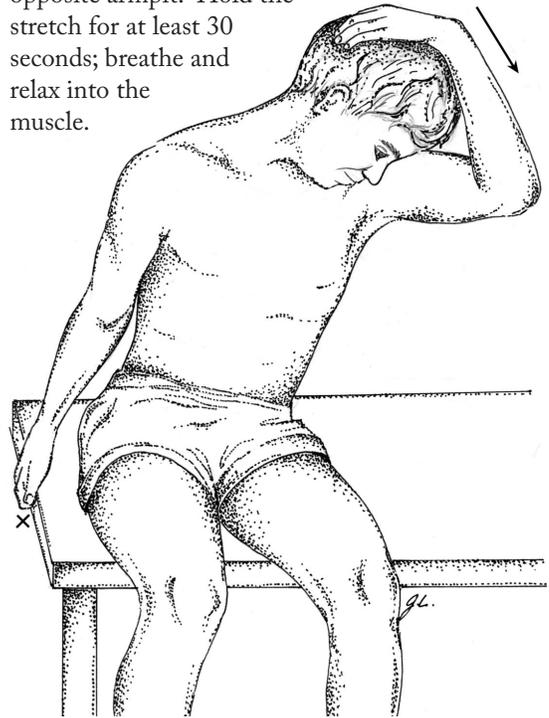


Figure C. Levator scapula self-stretch (right)

For appointment bookings or more information, please call: (905) 897-8889