

What can Bodywork do for you?

Hands-on therapy is not just about relaxation – it can boost energy and give you a new lease of life.

By Sue Bennett

There is a great deal of choice when looking for a Bodywork practitioner. If you've got back pain, shoulder tension, headaches, arthritis or other general aches and pains, you have to take a good look around and ask the question: "What feels right for me?"

Investigate a few therapists, and don't accept the views of the first person you visit. Often the therapist will offer free consultations for unsure patients. Part of the healing process is the fact that you feel comfortable with the practitioner, their thought processes and their ability to communicate, in a way that makes sense to you.

We often seek help when we have experienced a specific injury such as "whiplash", back pain and frozen shoulder, to name a few. However, these are often acute injuries on top of chronic postural imbalances which many of us have carried around for years. These could include rounded shoulders, forward heads and low mobility in the hips.

A chronic postural imbalance often comes from the stresses of everyday life, and is common especially with those who practise manual work with a repetitive movement (builders, hairdressers, dentists etc). Upper body imbalances are brought on progressively more often by the modern world, which has us stuck in front of computers and on cell phones all the time.

Even when office workers have an ergonomic set-up, this doesn't take into account the pressure of onscreen demands causing stress and disconnection from our physical selves.

Some difficulties could go back as far as our childhood where sometimes people pick up a self-protecting posture.

This is all important because chronic poor posture can lead to low energy. Muscle fibres become shorter and contracted. The body automatically uses energy to maintain the

contraction in the shortened fibres. At times this can lead to chronic fatigue, headaches, unexplained aches and pains throughout the body and occasionally digestive problems.

Long term rounded shoulders create compression through the lungs and could lead to habitual shallow breathing. This restricts oxygen distribution in the body, and can also leave us vulnerable to infection as we're not doing the deep breathing that can cleanse the lungs.

The knock-on effect of compression through the body can generate a slow and sluggish digestive system and increasing fatigue. While the tight, short muscles burn up energy, the weak, long muscles don't "fire" properly. These weak muscles must re-establish both their strength and nervous system responses to

regain their functionality.

Remedial and orthopaedic massage looks at imbalances through the muscular and skeletal system. The therapist gently works deep into the muscle which encourages the body's own healing power and ability to repair. Through the lengthening of the muscle fibres that switches on the neurological responses and the reduction of inflammation, we allow decompression and realigning to naturally take place.

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Case Study: headaches and neck tension

Mrs S (age 46) had a forward head position, extreme rounded shoulders and a posturally rotated pelvis. She also experienced shallow breathing and slow digestion.

Through the assessment it became clear that Mrs S had been "set" in this posture since she was four years old. It was explained that the best way for the headaches and neck tension to be addressed would be through correcting her posture. A treatment plan was devised to address her shortened muscles first, that is to say, the front of the neck and chest, using soft tissue mobilization, specific muscle energy techniques and orthopaedic massage.

After three treatments Mrs S commented on an increase in energy, improved mobility and a reduced amount of headaches. Finally she was able to hold her head properly due to the increased neurological function and strength reintroduced into the muscles supporting her cervical spine.

As the weak and inhibited muscles were addressed over a period of six more treatments, Mrs S began to stand tall, and with this new stance she commented that not only she was breathing better, she found life less stressful, and was surprised at her new-found energy. She said her head felt much clearer.

