

Myofascial Unwinding

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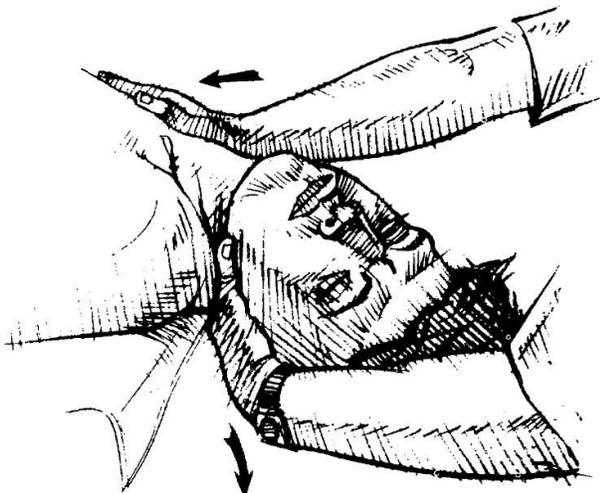
By John F. Barnes, PT



To ask how the mind communicates with the body, or how the body communicates with the mind, assumes that the two are separate entities. My experience has shown me that they are a single unit. The body is not just a reflection of the personality, it is the personality.

Mind/body awareness encompasses two different aspects of the same spectrum, immutably joined, inseparable and in constant communication. Myofascial release techniques and myofascial unwinding allow for the complete communication necessary for healing and true growth. I believe that the body remembers everything.

The link between mind/body awareness and healing is the concept of state-dependent memory, learning and behavior. A certain smell, or the sound of a particular piece of music creates a flashback phenomenon, producing a visual, sensorimotor replay of a past event or important episode in our lives. All of us have experienced this. The vividness of the recall is as if it were happening at that moment. I would like to expand this theory to include position-dependent memory, learning and behavior, where the structural position of the body in space is the missing component in the state-dependent theory.



Myofascial release, the missing link in mind/body therapy.

Studies have shown that during periods of trauma, people sustain indelible imprints that have high levels of emotional content. The body can hold information below the conscious level as a protective mechanism, so these memories tend to become dissociated. Memories are state or position-dependent and can therefore be retrieved when the person is in a particular state or position. The information is not available in the normal, conscious state, and the body's protective mechanisms keep us away from the positions that our mind/body awareness construes as painful or traumatic.

It has been consistently demonstrated that when a myofascial release technique takes the tissue to a significant position, or when myofascial unwinding allows a body part to assume a significant position three-dimensionally in space, the tissue not only changes and improves, but also raises memories, associated emotional states and belief systems to the conscious level. This awareness allows the individual to grasp the previous hidden information that may be creating or maintaining symptoms or behavior that deter improvement. With the information now at the conscious level, the individual is in a position to learn what holding or bracing patterns have impeded progress. This release of the tissue, emotions and hidden information creates an environment for change that is both conscious and effective.

The therapist, using the myofascial unwinding process, acts as a facilitator, following the body's inherent motions. When a significant position is attained, the craniosacral rhythm will shut down to a still point. During this still point a reversible amnesia surfaces, replaying all of the physiologic responses, memories and emotional states that occurred during a past traumatic event. This dissociation, or reversible amnesia, is a "double-conscious" state. In other words, what is learned or remembered at the time of trauma is dependent on the psychophysiologic state of the individual at the time of the experience. The block between the conscious and subconscious minds is the source of many poor or temporary therapy results.

Myofascial release and myofascial unwinding bring the tissue or body part into a position that allows the individual to be aware of his or her divided consciousness. Reactivating the conditions and the resulting physiologic responses during which trauma was acquired through this flashback

phenomenon allow for the patient's conscious awareness. The patient then has the option to change.

Myofascial release and myofascial unwinding techniques relieve excessive pressure on pain-sensitive structures that produce pain and limit full, fluid motion. These techniques also re-educate the central nervous system for new movement possibilities.

New neurobiological research and Hans Selye's classic work are concerned with the phenomenon of state-dependent memory, learning and behavior. State-dependent memory, learning and behavior is the process of learning that takes place in all complex organisms that have a cerebral cortex and a limbic-hypothalamic system, and Pavlovian and Skinnerian conditioning are specific varieties of it.

Memory and learning of all higher organisms fall into two classes of internal responses:

1. Memory trace on the molecular-cellular-synaptic level.
2. Involvement of the amygdala and hippocampus of the limbic-hypothalamic system in processing and encoding, and recall of the specific memory trace may be located elsewhere in the brain.

The limbic-hypothalamic system is the central core to Selye's general adaptation syndrome, the three states - the alarm reaction, the state of resistance and the stage of exhaustion - which take on a profound significance.

The hormones responsible for the retention of memory, epinephrine and norepinephrine, are released during the alarm stage by the activation of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system. The state or position the person is in at the moment of trauma is encoded into the system as the person progresses into the stage of resistance. The system adapts and develops strategies to protect itself from further trauma, fear or memories by avoiding those three-dimensional positions. The emotions communicate this mind/body information through its network by way of the neuropeptides. This creates a vicious cycle of interplay among the endocrine, immune and autonomic neuromyofascial systems, and the neuropeptides.

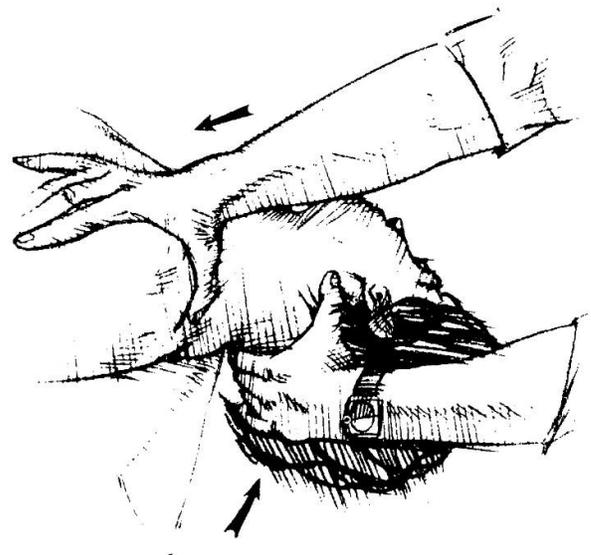
If this cycle continues too long, the person enters the exhaustion stage, in which the body's defense mechanisms expand enormous amounts of energy, thereby depleting one's reserve and perpetuating or enlarging the symptom complex.

Selye frequently described this type of resistance as being "stuck in a groove" --- something we have all experienced. When something familiar happens, we react subconsciously, until these hidden memories and learned behaviors are brought to the surface. Myofascial unwinding brings this information to a conscious level, allowing patients to experience it and let go.

SUBCONSCIOUS PATTERNS

Why don't normal body movements or daily activities reproduce these memories, emotions and outdated beliefs? I believe that these positions represent fear, pain or trauma. In an attempt to protect itself from further injury, the subconscious does not allow them to move into positions that reenact the micro events and important micro cognitions essential for lasting change. The body then develops strategies or patterns to protect itself. These subconscious holding patterns eventually form specific muscular tone or tension patterns, and the fascial component then tightens into these habitual positions of strain as a compensation to support the misalignment that results. Therefore, the repeated postural and traumatic insults of a lifetime, combined with the tensions of emotional and psychological origin, result in tense, contracted, bunched and fatigued fibrous tissue.

A discrete area of the body may become so altered by its efforts to compensate and adapt to stress that structural, and eventually pathological changes become apparent. Researchers have shown that the type of stress involved can be entirely physical, such as the repetitive postural strain adopted by a dentist or hairdresser, or purely psychic, such as chronic, repressed anger.



Myofascial unwinding to release cervical pain, tension and headache.

More often than not, a combination of mental and physical stresses alters the neuromyofascial and skeletal structures, creating an identifiable physical change that generates further stress, such as pain, joint restriction, general discomfort and fatigue. A chronic stress pattern produces long-term muscular contraction which, if prolonged, causes energy loss, mechanical inefficiency, pain cardiovascular pathology and hypertension.

Working in reverse, myofascial release and myofascial unwinding free the fascial tissue restriction, thereby altering the habitual muscular response and allowing the positional, reversible amnesia to surface, producing emotions and beliefs that are the cause of the holding patterns and ultimate symptoms. Thus it is important for the therapist to quiet his or her mind and feel the inherent motions. Quietly following the tissue or body part three-dimensionally along the direction of ease takes the patient into the significant restrictions or positions. With myofascial unwinding, the therapist eliminates gravity from the system. This unloading of the structure allows the body's righting reflexes and

protective responses to temporarily suspend their influence. The body then can move into positions that allow these state- or position-dependent physiological or flashback phenomena to recur. As this happens within the safe environment of a myofascial release session, the therapist can facilitate the body's inherent self-correcting mechanism to obtain improvement.

The myofascial release approach is not just an assembly of techniques. It creates a whole-body awareness that allows health professionals to facilitate change, growth and the possibility for total resolution of restrictions, emotions and belief systems which impede patient progress.

John F Barnes, PT, conducts myofascial release treatment in Malvern, PA and Sedona, AZ. Additional information on Myofascial Release Treatment Centers and Seminars can be obtained by calling 1-800-FASCIAL.
