

SIMPLE TOOLS FOR PAIN RELIEF AND SELF CARE

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- 1. SCALP MASSAGE** *Headache, neck tension, and to clear the head*
 - a. Put your hands on your head with thumbs behind the ears and fingertips at the hairline.
 - b. With your fingertips, gently scratch or rub in little circles. Start at the front, and work your way up and over the crown to the back of your head, massaging as you go. Repeat this several times along parallel lines until you have covered the whole head.
 - c. Stop to scratch the area where the back of your head meets the neck. Let your head hang forward if you can.

- 2. ACUPRESSURE** *Headache, depression, promotes concentration, memory, and calm*
 - a. Start with your thumbs behind the ears and fingers on the top of your head. Move your thumbs towards each other until they are about 3 inches apart. Feel under the base of the skull for two little hollows. Hook your thumbs there and press upwards gently but firmly. Hold for up to a minute while you take deep, slow breaths.
 - b. Find the small groove between your eyebrows, just above the place where the bridge of your nose meets the forehead. Press lightly with the middle finger and hold it while you breathe deeply.
 - c. Place your thumbs at the back of each ear. Where your fingertips meet on top of the head, there is a little hollow. Feel lightly to find it and press gently. Try pressing this at the same time as the previous point above the nose.

- 3. SELF MASSAGE FOR TRIGGER POINTS** *Neck, shoulder and upper back stiffness or pain*
 - a. From the back of head all the way down the neck, walk your fingers, and feel for tender spots, knots or bands in the muscles. Stroke them lengthwise, if it feels good.
 - b. Cup your hand on the opposite shoulder where it meets the neck. Reach with your fingertips to touch the inside corner of the shoulder blade. Press there while you swing your arm around and you will feel one or more tender knots. They may feel crunchy.

- c. In the wad of muscles above the shoulder blade are many trigger points. Walk your fingers out to the shoulder joint and in towards the spine to explore the territory. You can make little circles as you go, or use different amounts of pressure to find the most sensitive spots. They should hurt, but in a good way. When you find a good spot to treat, you may stroke it, press with all four fingers or up to a minute or press with a small ball held in your hand. Slow, deep breaths will help you relax into it.
- d. Feel down your back between the shoulder blade and spine (if you can reach). Another way to find and treat trigger points in the upper back is to lean on a ball against the wall, or lie face up with your weight on top of a ball.
- e. Whether you use your hand or a ball, it should hurt a little, but feel good at the same time, and should feel better afterwards. Don't over do it. Do a little each day.
- f. People with chronic pain often learn to ignore their pain, so when you start poking around you may find places you never even knew hurt! Don't let that scare you off! You can use that new knowledge to help yourself feel better.

4. BACK MASSAGE WITH A BALL

Upper, middle or lower back and sciatica

- a. With a ball on a wall: Put a ball or other round object in a long sock or plastic bag. (You can do this without a sock, but you may end up chasing the ball). Sling it over your opposite shoulder and lean on it against a wall. Use the sock as a handle to move the ball up and down to find tender spots to treat. Look for sore places on either side of the spine, between the shoulder blades, and way down near the buttocks. To get more pressure move your feet further away from the wall.
- b. Lying down: Lie face up with your knees bent. Place your ball under the tender areas of your back or buttocks and let your weight fall on it. You can adjust the pressure by resting more or less of your weight on it. Try to relax into it.
- c. Double whammy: Use two balls in a sock or wrap them in a towel, and lie on them with one ball on each side of the spine.
- d. About balls: A smaller or harder ball is more precise, but more painful. If a ball feels too hard, wrap something around it. Anything round can work but if you use an orange or potato, put it in a plastic bag.

5. DOOR HANGS

Upper, mid and lower back pain or stiffness

- a. Find a sturdy door and stand a few feet from it. Hold onto both knobs if the door is open or hold one knob if you are sure it will stay shut.
- b. Hold on tight and lean back on your heels little by little until all your weight is hanging from the door and you can feel a nice stretch in your back.
- c. Move your feet closer to the door to stretch the low back, and farther out to stretch the middle and upper parts. Find different heights to hang from. Do this with a friend by facing each other and holding each other's wrists while you lean your weight back.

6. POSITIONS OF COMFORT

For rest and sleeping

- a. Standing: For low back pain or sciatica, place either foot on a step or low surface in front of you. This will flatten out the arch in your back. Lean forward and put your weight on the higher knee by leaning on it with your hands or forearms.
- b. Lying on your side: Put a pillow or rolled up towel (or piece of clothing) between the cheek and shoulder so the neck muscles on the bottom side are not shortened. If your neck feels supported, it will not be so tense. Place a pillow (or substitute in front of you for your upper arm or knee to rest on.
- c. Lying face up: Roll a towel (or piece of clothing) and place it under your neck. Place a much bigger roll (blankets, laundry or duffle bag) under the knees to flatten out your back and help it relax. Try a heating pad (or hot towel in a plastic bag) on top of the neck or back roll. You can also place a ball under a sore spot.
- d. While on your back: Hug your knees with both arms and pull them in close to your chest to stretch your back. Try this before you get out of bed. If your arms do not reach, use a towel. To give your back a nice massage, try this on a hard surface and roll back and forth and side to side.

7. MORE TRICKS

Be nice to yourself!

- a. Soak your feet in hot water for 10 minutes. It can relax your whole body. If you want, add 1/2 cup of Epsom Salts, or a scent such as lavender for stress.
- b. For a treat: On the palm of the hand and inner wrist and arm are many calming acupressure points. Use an oil or lotion to massage them. Rest your hand on a table or lap and use the heel of other hand to stroke firmly up and down from elbow to hand and back. To press without strain, keep your elbows close and lean in with your body weight.

SELF-CARE RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS AND PATIENTS

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The Trigger Point Therapy Workbook: Your Self -Treatment Guide to Pain Relief

Claire Davies and Amber Davies, New Harbinger Press, Oakland, CA

note:

2nd Edition (2004) has more written material and case history, and more detailed instructions on self-treatment.

3rd Edition (2013) is better organized and easier to access, with more charts and illustrations, but the instructions on self treatment are less explicit.

Acupressure's Potent Points, A Guide to Self-Care for Common Ailments

Michael Reed, New Harbinger Press, Oakland, CA, 1990

Acupressure for Emotional Healing, A Self-Care Guide for Trauma, Stress and Common Emotional Imbalances

Michel Reed Gach and Beth Ann Henning, Bantam Books, New York, 2004

The Acupuncture Response, Balance Energy and Restore Health—a Western Doctor Tells You How

Glenn S. Rothfeld and Suzanne LeVert, Contemporary Books, 2001