

# Rewarding Learning Curve with Massage..

By David Hall, Qualified Massage Therapist

It was about 11 years ago when I did my first massage course. There have been many times since then I wished I had studied massage 30 years ago.

The learning curve has been a fascinating and rewarding experience.

The more I learn and know about the human body, the more I am amazed the concepts of remedial massage - if not the techniques - are not taught to all high school students.

Unfortunately, the education system doesn't even make touch-typing a compulsory subject like English and Maths when every aspect of our lives is touched by computers with keyboards.

So there is little hope our current education bureaucrats will ever be astute enough to realise the health benefits, future medical cost savings and beneficial social implications of human movement being a compulsory subject.

## **Big Savings.**

If more people understood the interactions of the body's muscles, joints and skeletal system, this country could save hundreds of millions of dollars a year in Medicare costs for unnecessary visits to doctors.

That is no reflection on the medical profession. It is an observation that many people, simply because they are uninformed, don't seek out the most appropriate form of professional health care for many muscle or joint related ailments.

Right from the time we are infants we are conditioned to accept that when we are in pain or something feels wrong with our bodies, we go to the doctor.

In many cases with muscle and joint pain, a visit to a remedial massage therapist would be much more appropriate and the treatment more effective and long lasting.

The professional therapeutic massage industry is working to overcome this lack of knowledge, but the benefits are not always obvious until people try a remedial deep tissue massage for themselves.



With every new patient I like to spend at least 10 to 15 minutes explaining the interaction of the various muscles.

In doing so, it soon becomes obvious to the patient that an area of pain might be just a symptom of a muscular problem in another area, which also needs treatment to overcome the initial problem.

Often people put up with pain for some time - even years - thinking modern medicine is the best or only treatment. But when they find that popping a pill doesn't work and they don't want surgery, they put up with the pain.

## **Light Turned On.**

With many patients, it's almost like the light was just turned on when they realise just how simple and obvious the massage concepts and treatments are when someone takes the time to explain them in plain language.

One of my recent massage patients was a hardworking building tradesman in his mid 50s who had put up with back and neck pain for years but had never considered trying a massage until cajoled by his wife (another patient).

It was almost like a heavy weight (as well as the pain!) was being lifted off his shoulders when he started understanding the various contributing factors for his pain and how it could be treated with remedial massage.

It's really only necessary to understand and accept, in very simple terms, that every muscle in the body has an opposing muscle ("prime mover" and "antagonist" muscles).

In other words, when one muscle or group of muscles contract (eg the biceps to flex the arm), the antagonist muscle (eg the triceps to straighten the arm) must release.

If the opposing muscle is too tight or inflexible and does not release sufficiently, the prime mover muscle has to work harder to move a limb, bend or twist the body, etc. In some cases, this will cause the prime mover muscle to become weak and sore or it could pull joints out of alignment.

A classic case of this is in the neck. People may feel sore on one side of the neck and have trouble turning their head. But when the neck and shoulder are massaged, they find the non-sore side is actually stiffer and tighter.

**Too Tight.**

What is usually happening in this case is the sore side has become painful because the muscles trying to turn the head that way are having to work too hard against tight opposing muscles.

The same concepts can be applied throughout the body.

A competent remedial massage therapist will consider all these factors and in doing so will not only seek to treat the symptom of the problem, but also to find and eliminate or ease the cause/s of the problem.

In this column I have regularly mentioned the relationship of the hip flexor muscles which flex the hip/lift the leg. They even have an effect on shoulder movement because of their potential to cause pain and tightness in back muscles.

If I told a new massage patient I wanted to do a muscle release technique on the front of his/her hips to help fix a shoulder problem, I would most likely get a quizzical stare if I had not explained the hip/shoulder relationship in simple terms.

If school children also understood these muscle interactions and relationships, it may help them prevent a range of sporting and other muscle injuries at a very active time in their lives.

But I'm not going to hold my breath waiting for the Education Department to wake up.

If you'd like more information about massage, call one of our qualified therapists today.

