

Health & Fitness

Relieving Pain and Staying Healthy Non-Traditional Treatments to Keep You in a Healthy Balance

BY PATTIE CINELLI

Over the past decade in this column I have written about alternative and integrative treatments that can relieve pain, decrease stress and if practiced regularly, can help prevent illness. It is much easier to stay well than to try to get well once you are out of balance.

Most of these treatments are not taught to traditional western medical practitioners although acupuncture and massage have been gaining ground in mainstream medicine. All modalities I talk about in this article are non-invasive except for acupuncture. Most deal with soft tissue issues – an MRI or X-Ray can show if a serious injury is present. All also have many “miraculous” anecdotal healing stories. And none of them work for everyone.

While the cost of these therapies may not be covered by insurance, some costs may be covered under flexible spending accounts. The price for most is far less than the cost of most prescription drugs or for surgery, hospital stays or other invasive treatments undertaken when the pain becomes unbearable.

Most of the techniques I describe I have used. I roll on a foam ball regularly; I receive monthly massages and reflexology treatments. I seek Active Release Technique from Dr. Martin Skopp in Alexandria when I know I need help and, as a level 2 Reiki practitioner, I regularly do Reiki on me and on my dog Marcello. I periodically get Rolfing tune-ups. I also practice several kinds of meditation depending on my mood of the day – walking meditation, breath work or guided meditation.

I have suggested many of these methods to dozens of friends and clients who have complained of chronic pain that their doctors could not heal or who have had an injury or decreased

range of motion. The methods can be used with more traditional treatments or alone or for maintenance of health.

Soft Tissue Release

I couldn't do an article about releasing pain without mentioning fascia release. Many are discovering the value of rolling on foam rollers and balls as a way to get rid of minor aches and pain that stretching doesn't touch. Fascia is the sheet of connective tissue that surrounds and binds down muscles and tendons. If you took all bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments and organs out of your body, the fascia would remain in your body's shape. Foam rolling can release the fascia closest to the surface, which can create greater range of motion, reduce pain and restore well being. One of my clients often uses this technique and massage to relieve the incredible pain in her neck and shoulders that gives her migraine headaches.

Massage

Massage has been an important part of my health and fitness regimen over the past 20 years. I don't look at it as a luxury because it helps keep me injury, pain, drug and surgery-free. It also relieves stress and imbalances that have accumulated in my muscles. Massage increases the blood, oxygen and nutrients flowing in the body. When a muscle becomes warm from blood flow, the soft tissue becomes more liquid and malleable. Massage improves circulation and can improve lymphatic



Mary Rieger of Healing Arts heals a patient with acupuncture. Photo: Andrew Lightman

drainage. Massage may be the oldest and simplest form of medical care. According to www.holisticonline.com, Egyptian tomb paintings show people being massaged. It can help lower the heart and pulse rate, detoxify the body, assist weight loss, improve muscle tone, and relieve emotional tension and pain. A massage should be relaxing and pleasurable. There are many different kinds of massage from which to choose – deep tissue, Swedish, hot stone, sports massage and Thai to name a few. To find a massage therapist on the Hill, check the listings on page 114 in the 2010 Fagon Community Guide.

Reflexology

Reflexology is an ancient healing art that originated in China thousands

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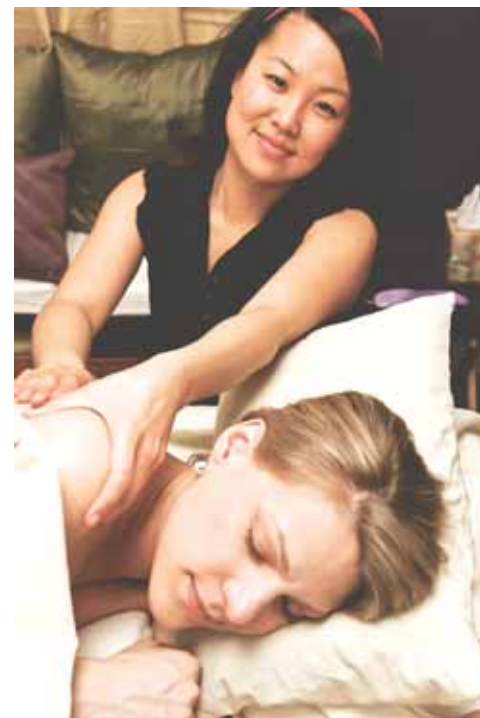
of years ago. Some people mistakenly think it is similar to a foot massage. In the 1930s, the American physiotherapist Eunice Ingham discovered that the most powerful reflex points were located in the feet, and she eventually drew up the foot maps that are still in use today. Seven thousand nerve endings on the soles of the feet track to all areas of the body. A Reflexologist is able, through touch of a specific area, to reduce the level of toxicity in the body and increase organs' function. "Reflexology can feel good," said Pat Meyer comes to my house once a month for a session. "But it can feel somewhat tender as those areas with toxin are worked out." She has worked with hyperactive children, depressed people and seniors. Reflexology can help people with migraines, allergies, fatigue, and sleep disorders, women who have problems with menstrual cramps or menopause and people for whom stress exacerbates on illness.

Active Release Technique

For more of a deep fascia release, Active Release Technique (ART) can help. ART has been a well-kept secret in the medical field for more than 20 years. The method relieves pain without the use of drugs, needles or knives. It's a hands-on approach to the treatment of injuries of muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia, nerves and the surrounding soft tissue. The technique and name is patented and trademarked to allow people anywhere to receive standard results from standard procedures. ART's technique and successes have been well documented in published research findings and patient profiles. Whether you are an athlete who has over-trained, an office worker with poor posture, a squash player with knee pain or a weekend warrior with aches and pains, ART may help.

Rolfing

Rolfing Structural Integration is an original and scientifically validated system of body restructuring and movement education. Dr. Ida Rolf founded it about 60 years ago. It releases the body's segments – legs, torso, arms, etc. – from life-long patterns of tension and racing, permitting gravity to realign them. By doing so, it balances the body. The results are increased grace, ease and efficiency of movement, a more powerful sense of self and often the relief of physical stress caused by gravity-resistant movement patterns. Rolfing addresses connective tissue and Rolfers use muscles as landmarks. They do not massage muscles. They release the tissue. "You can release the muscle, but if the envelope it sits in (connective tissue) is full or has adhesions or scar tissue, then the muscle will return to the old pattern," ex-



plained my Rolfer Rebecca Carli-Mills. "You have to give it more space so it behaves differently." Rolfers think in terms of the nervous system and the integration of their work. "For example, I notice that someone who comes to me for back pain is not standing on the center of their feet. If I just relax their back and don't make them aware of how to use their feet differently, the old painful patterns will resurface." A basic Rolfing session lasts about an hour to an hour-and-a-half. Each builds upon the previous session.

Reiki

Rub your hands together rapidly. Now hold them apart. Feel the vibration. Feel the energy. That's Reiki. When you stub your toe or bump your arm, what's your immediate response. That's Reiki.

Reiki is a Japanese technique used for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing. A Reiki Master administers the treatment which is based on the idea that an unseen life force energy flows through us and is what causes us to be alive. If one's life force energy is low, then we are more likely to get sick or feel stress, and if it is high, we are more capable of being happy and healthy. The word Reiki is made up of two Japanese words – Rei, which means the essence of everything in the universe or the Higher Power, and Ki, which is life force energy. The treatment can unlock blocked energy that may cause disease. It can be used to treat simple ailments such as a headache or toothache or can be used to supplement other treatments for severe illness and give people a better quality of life.

Acupuncture and Acupressure

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese therapy that involves the insertion of very thin needles into the skin at specific points in order to restore the body's energy to harmony. It is used to treat all kinds of illness particularly pain, allergies, asthma, anxiety, neurological disorders, digestive and bowel problems, insomnia and stress. It also can be used for a supportive therapy for cancer, AIDS, multiple sclerosis and others. Treatment involves the insertion of one to 16 or more needles for five to 30 minutes. In most cases, it is painless. The treatment usually takes 48 hours to fully work, and improvement is usually seen in three to six treatments.

Acupressure is a massage therapy involving the stimulation of acupuncture points using the fingers instead of needles. Practitioners use firm finger pressure and stimulate the points, usually for five to 15 minutes. It can be used in massage and is effective in treating pain, nausea, digestive disorders, migraines, tiredness, insomnia and depression.

For a list of acupuncturists on the Hill check page 110 of the "2010 Fagon Community Guide".

As practitioners and patients get more frustrated with the limitations of an exclusively scientific approach to healing they are turning to methods that treat the whole body, mind and soul as a way helping people to feel better. The above are just a few of the treatments from which to choose. No one is meant to live with pain. It is a signal that something is out of alignment. Having patience, introspection and the courage to be open to possibilities can bring the whole you back into balance.

Pattie Cinelli has been a fitness professional for more than 20 years and has been writing her Hill Rag column for more than 10 years. You may contact her at: fitness@pattie-cinelli.com. ★

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