

UNDERSTANDING MUSCLE AND JOINT PAIN

By **GRAHAM NELSON**
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ABOUT NORTHWEST PHYSIOTHERAPY GROUP

Northwest Physiotherapy Group was first established as Essendon and Moonee Ponds Physiotherapy Clinic in 1990. We have over 50 years combined experience in muscle and joint conditions, and a fully equipped, purpose built facility with state of the art pilates studio and rehab gym.

We can have you feeling fitter, stronger, more energetic and pain-free in the shortest possible time.

“Get fast, effective, long term results with new approach to Physiotherapy based on current pain research. We provide expert hands-on assessment and treatment of the whole body and teach you how to manage the cause of your problem”

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We know that lots of people carry around aches and pains, little niggles and areas of tension in their bodies. You may notice this as that stiff feeling in your legs when you get up after sitting for a while, or that tightness across the shoulders at the end of a long work day.

These symptoms are usually the outward signs of other dysfunction or imbalance in the body.

Many people are not aware of these imbalances in their musculoskeletal system, which can cause tiredness, fatigue (AND GRUMPINESS!) and can lead to acute neck and back pain, or strange numbness/ tingling in their arm or hand. Unfortunately most people won't act on them until it is too late.

Research shows that as you age, one of the most significant attributes that we lose is our muscle strength. In fact it has found shown that as you age you lose lean muscle mass (up to 30% decline in strength and 40% decline in muscle size between 2nd and 7th decade).

WHAT DOES THIS ACTUALLY MEAN FOR OUR BODIES AND HEALTH?

Well, a reduction in muscle strength means it becomes more difficult for us to move our limbs, and because our muscles provide support to the joints they cross in the body, a loss of strength means that our joints are less supported and protected, and more pressure goes through them. This in turn leads to stiffness in the joints of the body, and increases the wear of these joints.... ***And when joints begin to wear they are more likely to cause pain!***



This pain and stiffness then alters the way we move, because the brain and body try to compensate for the loss of function around a joint, and this then creates other imbalances around the body. The brain also detects that a problem is arising and sends signals to the surrounding muscles and soft tissues to tense up to protect the area. This is called **protective muscle guarding or spasm.**

Before you know it, you are reaching differently, walking differently and bending differently **and the worst thing is, you don't even realise this is happening!!** This is because your brain tries to restore your body to its optimal level of function automatically, and this occurs at a subconscious level, beyond your conscious awareness.

Now if you have a couple of minor imbalances in your musculoskeletal system, the body can do a pretty good job at managing them and you probably won't feel any pain and very little stiffness.

However, if things accumulate, and these imbalances stack up, they may exceed the level at which the body is able to manage them. The result is pain and dysfunction, ie reduced ability to function within individual or collective body parts, such as your back, neck, shoulders or knees.

SO WHAT CAUSES THESE IMBALANCES TO STACK UP?

As mentioned, strength loss is a huge factor which increases as you age. Other factors include poor posture, prolonged static postures like sitting at a computer or driving, repetitive bending or lifting, a big day in the garden, or even running for a tram/bus when you haven't run since you were in your twenties!!

All these activities can place stress on the weakening musculoskeletal system and cause a cascade of imbalances that leave you tired, stiff, lethargic and in pain!!

The latest neuroscience research suggests that the pain you feel in your body is a signal from your brain that something is wrong, ie pain is not understood to be a feeling, but more a warning sign to alert you to do something about it.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT AND MANAGE THIS?

There are several things you can do:

1. Develop and maintain strength of all of your key muscle groups.
2. Maintain a good level of cardiovascular fitness with regular exercise. The current recommendations from the Heart Foundation are 30-40min of moderate intensity exercise, such as a brisk walk, a swim or cycling on most days of the week.

3. Reduce static postures like prolonged sitting, driving etc so that you are moving more regularly. This increases blood flow, reduces muscle tension and joint stiffness.
4. Maintain adequate joint and muscle flexibility with regular stretching.

If you do notice ongoing issues like stiffness or pain, it is likely that your musculoskeletal system may be out of balance. First of all, all these imbalances and weaknesses must be detected, analysed and corrected to the best level possible. Only then can your body start to move with more freedom and less pain, and as pain or discomfort reduces, muscles start to work in a more natural way with greater ease.

HOW CAN A THOROUGH ASSESSMENT HELP ME?

Based on our years of training and experience working with people from all ages and levels of health and fitness, from elite to amateur, we have developed a *screening tool* that can identify these areas of weakness, imbalance and movement restriction.

There are no fancy gimmicks, just a thorough Physiotherapy assessment which includes strength, flexibility, muscle activation/imbalance patterns, joint stability tests, passive intervertebral movement tests and also evaluates any past injuries. Because we are examining your whole musculoskeletal system at the one time, we can get to the source of your problems a lot quicker, giving you faster and more lasting results. It is a new treatment approach we have been using which has been delivering some fast effective results for our clients.

We can also use this information to develop an individualised strength program which may be either gym or home based. This will help to combat one of the main factors leading to musculoskeletal dysfunction, ie strength loss.

You can read some of our clients' good results being achieved by the treatment of structures far from their painful or symptomatic area in the blog section of our website: www.nwpg.com.au/physiotherapist-blog

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

Simply call our rooms at Moonee Ponds on **9370 5654**, or send an appointment request through the website and they will book you in for your assessment.

If needed, we can also assess your feet on our “Gaitscan” to analyse how your feet are moving when you walk or run, and detect what specific abnormalities may exist that need rectifying.

So this is a holistic solution to your musculoskeletal health concerns, to get rid of those niggling pains, and get you feeling stronger, more energetic and healthier.

Your satisfaction with our professional, caring and thorough service is guaranteed.

(Please bring all reports/scans with you and be prepared to disrobe.)

We could have you moving better, feeling stronger, pain free and more energetic and this may happen faster than you may expect.