

The Stress/Pain Connection

Stress seems to be almost unavoidable in our busy lives. It's easy for people to suggest that you might feel better if you're less stressed, but if you're already stressed, that's just going to stress you out even more! Adding to the problem, stress can cause a lot of unwanted symptoms in your body, including pain. In some cases, stress causes pain to develop, like headaches. In others, it makes existing pain worse.

Think about it; if you're tensing your body up and putting stress quite literally onto your muscles, you are going to feel the effects of that in a sore back, shoulders and head. If you suffer with chronic pain anyway, stress can exacerbate it.

At one point or another, most of us have to deal with a certain amount of stress. Without it, some of us just wouldn't get anything done! It's when the stress builds up that it can start to cause issues in your body and make you hurt. One study found that 33 per cent of adults said they were dealing with high levels of perceived stress - you're not alone if one of them is you.

Stress affects more than just your mind – if you hold on to too much tension, it will most likely lead to muscle stiffness and pain. Too

much stress is also linked to headaches, fatigue, digestive problems, and insomnia; one study of people who suffered with chronic headaches found that 45 per cent said they'd been through a stressful event before they started to get the headaches. Other aches and pains can also be blamed on stress – it's thought that the stress hormone cortisol could be to blame for chronic pain. A study compared 16 people with chronic back pain to a control group and found that the people with chronic pain had higher levels of cortisol.

It pays not to let the stress build up, and one good way to physically disperse stress before it causes too much trouble is a good massage. Massage is the perfect way to relax you and improve your mood. Whatever effect stress has on your body and mood, treating yourself to a massage is one of the most relaxing ways to deal with a build-up of toxic stress or anxiety.

Almost every symptom of stress that's been listed by the American Psychological Association can benefit from massage therapy.

Research has even shown that massage therapy can lower your heart rate and blood pressure, (which can be raised when you are stressed) as well as soothing stress-related pain by relaxing your muscles and increasing the production of endorphins, which are your body's natural feel-good chemicals. A massage can also boost your body's production of serotonin and dopamine, giving you a feeling of well-

being that releases the stress, calms your mind and gives you the physical and mental break your body needs from all the stressful things that are making you hunch your shoulders.

Next time you feel the stress start to build up, don't wait until you get the tell take sore head or tight shoulders. Call your massage therapist and get it out of your system...