

M_x (Manual Therapy): Your Prescription (R_x) for Health

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From the ads on TV, you'd never guess it, but many, if not most, common medical problems stem from mechanical restrictions. Ironically, when symptoms arise, however, most of us reach for medicine (R_x) first, even though pharmaceuticals usually don't address the underlying mechanical restrictions and often bring undesired side-effects. The rule of thumb in medicine, is First, do no harm. A corollary of this is to try the simplest, least invasive approach first. Therefore, if you have a non-life-threatening health challenge, you should consider starting with manual therapy to make sure that your symptoms aren't the result of an easily treatable mechanical restriction..

Think about it. When something is wrong with the car, you don't add something to the gasoline. You look for a mechanic. Yet, too many of us take medicine at the first sign of illness. From the sub-cellular level up, the human body consists entirely of moving parts, and our health and vitality depends on those parts moving freely.

Consider the colon. Its function depends on peristalsis--wave-like, intrinsic movements--that propel fecal matter along. If the colon is glued to neighboring structures by adhesions, as is quite common, peristalsis will be significantly dampened. The first response to chronic bowel problems, therefore, should be to look for and free-up restrictions on the colon. Instead, most of us reach for fiber, water, and laxatives. These may produce relief, but they don't address the underlying problem.

By adulthood, most of us will have some restrictions on our internal organs, or viscera. Often, it is these mechanical restrictions that lie behind such common problems as gastric reflux, hiatal hernias, constipation, herniated discs, chronic back and neck pain; hypertension and other circulatory problems; immune problems; and chronic joint pain and muscular tension.

To function optimally, internal organs, including lungs, brain, heart, and the vascular system, need freedom of movement. When this movement is inhibited, symptoms begin to appear. Some symptoms, like lack of energy, may arise so subtly or are so non-specific that they escape detection for years. They can also be mistakenly attributed to aging, stress, or psychosomatic tendencies.

Common causes of mechanical restrictions include falls, collisions, and other physical trauma, surgical and dental procedures, thermal and chemical injuries, infections, and emotional and spiritual wounds. Often decades pass between the original injury and the appearance of symptoms. No matter how highly-trained practitioners may be, if they lack the required manual training and sensitivity, they will probably not find the mechanical restriction at the root of a given problem, and will instead focus on the symptoms which wastes time and money and can do more harm than good.

Symptoms are our body's way of getting our attention. Noted authorities like Andrew Weil, MD (author of Spontaneous Healing) have written about the dangers of eliminating or burying symptoms before we understand their message. The body is very wise. Among other things, it recruits--and therefore necessarily sacrifices--less important structures to protect more important structures. For example, about 60% of all spinal problems are actually situations in which muscles and the spine have been recruited to protect more important structures like blood vessels and internal organs.

Because mechanical restrictions are unavoidable, every person needs a body mechanic. Consider children: Even in the best of circumstances, infants arrive with at least a little physical trauma from in utero and the birth. In subsequent years, they fall, have collisions, and encounter emotional and spiritual upsets. They take on issues from their parents and others. They undergo medical and dental procedures, vaccinations, and are exposed to toxins. Each of these tends to produce mechanical restrictions.

Eventually, if not sooner, these restrictions will create significant pathology. Jump forward a few decades and even the healthiest bodies will have begun to exhaust their ability to compensate and auto-correct, hence the problems associated with middle age. The accumulated mileage puts a drag on the vascular and nervous system, on other internal organs, on joints and the spine. History is history, but a manual therapist can engage our inherent self-healing abilities, restore mobility and motility to internal organs and systems and our ability to compensate. Not only will the tissues operate as designed, but the effects of all that wear and tear can be largely reversed.

The power of human touch, when combined with proper intention and compassion, is virtually unlimited—in part because our inherent ability to heal ourselves. In looking for a body therapist, look for someone who has the ability, training, empathy, and willingness to take the time to use their hands therapeutically. Of all the forms of mechanical therapy, CranioSacral Therapy and Visceral Manipulation are among the most versatile because they are designed for finding and releasing hidden restrictions in the body's most critical systems and delicate structures.

Of course, life-threatening illnesses and true medical emergencies require immediate medical attention, and the associated drugs and procedures. However, once the situation is under control, a manual therapist may be able to greatly improve the prognosis. In non-emergencies, please consider seeking manual therapy (M_x) first, because mechanical work can find and treat the underlying causes, prevent irreversible damage, and optimize your over-all health and vitality—without incurring the risks of surgery or medication.