

How Structural Bodywork Works

Creating healing partnerships with an “insider view” of the process

Pain Signals

*aching ... throbbing ... burning ... stabbing ... tingling ... piercing ... grinding ...
tension ... stiffness ... restriction ... clicking ... pounding ...*

How many words can you think of to describe the pain that results from chronic muscle imbalance?

That's how it often starts. Hard to believe that a few tight muscles one day can turn into pain the next. But it happens. A lot. Of course usually it's a longer build-up than from one day to the next.

That's the chronic part.

It might go like this:

You fall and hurt your shoulder. It hurts for a few days, but then seems to go back to normal. You don't even notice the subtle movement restriction. But your body does. Every time you reach for something, that shoulder falls short—just a little. So your lower back over-extends to make the reach.

Two years later, you're reaching for a sofa pillow and your back goes "out". You think it was just the pillow, but really, your back's been overworking for two years. **Oww!** If you'd known this was going to happen, maybe it would have been better to deal with that shoulder in the first place!

Or like this:

You fall and hurt your shoulder. It hurts for a few days, but then seems to go back to normal. You don't even notice the subtle movement restriction. Or the fact that your shoulder now tilts low on that side ... and it pulls your neck right along with it.

If you were to look carefully in the mirror, you'd notice that your neck doesn't rest over the midline of your body anymore. But you don't. You do notice the headaches, though. This last one has been constant for a month. The doctor doesn't find anything wrong and offers you yet another pain pill.

Of course there are other scenarios:

- You fall off the barn roof, out of a tree, off a horse
- You have a car accident, or two.
- Maybe it's a sports injury.
- Your mom used to tug on your arm in the supermarket parking lot
- You were self-conscious about being taller than your classmates
- Maybe one leg is just a little bit shorter than the other
- Or about a million other reasons

The result is the same. In a healthy, balanced posture, the muscles have an easy job. With grace and ease, they engage and disengage smoothly as they help you maintain your position and day-to-day movement requirements. When subtle (and eventually not so subtle) muscular restrictions prevent that normal grace and ease, other areas of the body must compensate.

Eventually, the compensation takes its. One way or another, your body must get your attention. If it doesn't, you'll destroy tissue. You'll tear muscle, tear nerves, herniate discs, and degenerate joints — sometimes beyond repair. Your body doesn't want that to happen. It's trying to keep you healthy and active. So it uses a special language to communicate with you:

*aching ... throbbing ... burning ... stabbing ... tingling ... piercing ... grinding ...
tension ... stiffness ... restriction ... clicking ... pounding ...*

That's right, pain.

Pain is your signal that something's not right. Like the dashboard light on your car. "Listen up, buddy! And by the way if you don't there's going to be some real trouble ahead."

Taking a pain pill for a muscular problem is like pulling the wire on your dashboard light. It might work long enough to get you to the service station, but if you're smart, you'll find out what went wrong before the problem escalates out of control.

Think of neuromuscular therapy as a mechanical service protocol for your body. Just as you'd try and find the best car mechanic around to take care of your prized Chevrolet, an experienced neuromuscular therapist can help you figure out what's behind that pain signal you just got.

Really! Even if you've had it for years. Even if you've been to other therapists who did their best to help you.

Structural Bodywork is manual therapy that brings balance and equilibrium to the physical structure of the body by selectively loosening involved muscles. **Neuromuscular therapy** is a type of structural bodywork.

Structural alignment

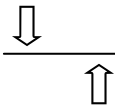
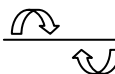


An experienced neuromuscular therapist will place a lot of importance on restoring balance and equilibrium to your body structure. Sometimes it's called posture. We use both terms: "structure" and "posture".

However in this use, we're talking about a *non-voluntary* or *unconscious posture pattern*. (So it's guilt-free! Get it?)

We'll evaluate your posture in four dimensions:

Dimensions of postural distortion

1. Deviation from level on a horizontal plane, or tilt. Creates lateral compression.
2. Rotation around a horizontal axis, or flexion / extension. Creates anterior to posterior compression.
3. Rotation around a vertical axis, or twisting. Creates torque.
4. Either anterior to posterior or lateral deviation on a vertical plane, or projection. Creates bowing or shear.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

We'll be looking at specific bony landmarks that are part of your skeletal system. For example, when we look to see if your head centers over your body properly from the side, we'll be looking to see if your ear canal lines up over the center of your upper arm bone.

When we look to see if your pelvis is level, we'll be comparing two landmark points on the front of your pelvic bones (near the hips) to one another; then we'll do the same thing with two other landmark points on the back.

Why is this important?

Glad you asked! This is one of the fundamental principles that makes structural bodywork work!

It's called balance.

Compensation.

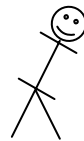
Equilibrium.

**"To each and every action, there is always opposed an equal and opposite reaction."
Sir Isaac Newton
3rd Law of Motion**

Your body is designed to arrange itself around your center of gravity in a certain way. It's no big mystery. Artists from the time of Leonardo DaVinci have been drawing anatomically proportioned sketches of the body. When your body lines up well, it works well. When it doesn't, all kinds of automatic body reflexes kick in to keep you from falling over. ☺

These are known as "righting reflexes". At their most basic, they are designed to keep your eyes facing forward and level with the horizon. Whatever it takes to make that happen, your body will do it. If it's not successful, you'll be dizzy and then you'll really be in a mess!

Imagine that your right hip is an inch higher than the left. What do you think would happen in your upper body? Would you tilt toward the left? Well, yes, you'd probably start out that way. But how often do you see someone walking around like this?



No good is it? What would they do instead? Probably something more like this:



What's the difference? Simple. In the second view, the person's (let's call her Sue) righting reflexes kicked in and her head straightened out. It's a compensation for the original problem, which is that her pelvis tilts higher on the right and low on the left. Cool. She can see straight and doesn't walk into stuff like she would the other way.

But what to you suppose is happening in her neck and shoulders? How about her back? Ooh. I'm not sure we want to know.

My muscles do what???

So what happened? How did her body do that?

Here's a hint:

Muscles Move Bones

When the body's righting reflexes kick in, muscles are what move the body into its compensating position. In our example above, muscles are moving Sue's trunk off toward their left and muscles are moving her neck and shoulders back into the compensating position. Those muscles are working way too hard.

And if you're thinking like I am, you're thinking she probably knows it. She has constant or near-constant stiffness, tightness, or pain in her back and neck. Maybe some hip and shoulder problems (depending on how long this has been going on), and quite possibly a headache.

Let's say that Sue's main concern is a long-term headache problem. Let's say she already knows that when her head hurts, her neck and upper back tighten up at the same time. Sue comes into therapy looking for an answer. Where do we start?

We loosen up her neck muscles, right?

Not exactly.

But that's what she's complaining about!

Well of course we won't ignore her neck, but based upon the explanation above, can you see that we have to level Sue's pelvis first? How could we ever get anywhere with her neck if she went back into that tilt pattern the minute she stood up?

OK, I think you're getting the idea. The point is we look at the body alignment, figure out how that alignment relates to Sue's symptoms, then figure out what it's going to take to bring her back into balance.

To accomplish that, our main tool is manual therapy. We'll use it to loosen up muscles that are too tight. Since Sue has a pelvic tilt, we'll screen for an actual leg length difference. Then we'll set about selectively loosening the muscles that used to pull her body out of position.

That's it!

Your results

In the process here's what we could accomplish:

- Resolve pain, tingling, burning, numbness, vertigo, and hot or cold sensations caused by *trigger point referral*
- Relieve pain, throbbing, pulsing, stabbing caused by *ischemia* (lack of blood flow) or other *circulation impairments*, such as having too much blood in the head when venous return is impaired

Trigger point: a neurological phenomenon that results in referred sensation at a site that's distant from the site of origin (like when you pull a trigger and hit a distant target).

- Relieve *mechanical compression or pressure on the joints* that causes pain, restricted movement, excessive wear-and-tear and premature joint degeneration
- *Increase longevity* of the physical usefulness of your body
- Relieve *nerve entrapment* syndromes that can cause numbness, tingling, pain, burning, and lack of function
- Relieve *nerve compression* syndromes (such as sciatica and carpal tunnel syndrome) that can also cause pain, numbness, tingling, pain, burning, and lack of function
- Reduce *muscular strain and tension* from the effects of soft tissue compensation patterns
- Increase *range of motion* in the joints, reducing stiffness and other restriction
- *Increase available energy* to be utilized in the pursuit of accomplishing your life's goals, since it will no longer be wasted on dealing with chronic physical tension and pain
- *Improve mood*. Since various personality factors are linked to body structure, changing dysfunctional structure can also have a positive influence on personal mood characteristics.
- Neuromuscular therapy has also been shown clinically to *improve vision, improve balance, improve digestion, increase organ and glandular function, enhance sleep quality, reduce snoring, improve breathing function, and a variety of other positive outcomes*.

How can I get some of that?

Sound good? Most everyone could benefit from some attention to their body structure. But for people with chronic pain syndromes like back pain, neck pain, headaches, symptoms of fibromyalgia, sciatica, and compressed or restricted joints (back, shoulders, hips), the benefits of a successful structural bodywork program can be completely life-changing. Just think:

- You can get your life back.
- You can you have the energy to live your life to the fullest.
- You can add mechanical longevity to your body's lifespan. When you reach the age where you're free to travel, golf, or go sailing when you want—your body will be ready to do it!

We serve clients from within our local area of Minot, ND as well as those traveling in from other areas. You may be interested in bodywork services only or in one of our comprehensive programs. Check the "Bodywork Services" section of our website (<http://www.wellnessimages.com/Bodywork%20Services.htm>) for current rates and programs.

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P.S. You have something to offer the world that no one else does. You can't do your best if you don't feel good. Take care of your body. You're worth it!