

Deep Tissue Trigger Point Massage

by Mary X. Psaromatis, DC

There are three types of deep tissue techniques that will be addressed here: Trigger Point Pressure Release, Deep Stroking Massage, and Pin and Stretch. All effect the trigger points (TrPs) by locally stretching the TrPs and disrupting the motor endplates.

Trigger Point Pressure Release

Dr. Travell suggests that this method should replace the concept of ischemic compression (massage technique employing static pressure restricting blood flow), since the core of a trigger point is already quite hypoxic (lacking oxygen). This works well with patients that are sensitive or tend to flare up.

1. First the muscle is lengthened to the point of resistance.
2. Practitioner then applies gentle gradual pressure on the trigger point until he or she feels a definite increase in tissue resistance. The patient may experience discomfort, but not pain.
3. Pressure is maintained until there is a relief of tension under his or her fingers.
4. The practitioner increases pressure until the barrier is reached again.

Deep Stroking Massage (aka stripping)

This type of massage is best performed when the muscle is fully lengthened. According to Janett Travell M.D., this is probably the most effective way to manually treat MFTPs.

1. Patient should be positioned comfortably so the muscle is relaxed and lengthened so there is no slack and no pain.
2. Practitioner's thumbs or fingers slide along muscle till they reach the TrP.
3. As digits encounter resistance, they progress no faster than there is some "give" in the nodule.
4. Purpose of the pressure is to elongate the contracted area in the sarcomeres (shortening units) in the muscle.
5. Stroke should be continued along the rest of the band to the end of the muscle, and then repeated in the opposite direction if possible.

The reason this type of massage seems to work is that it stretches the sarcomeres in the TrP, returning them to a normal length, and seems to disrupt, or break the endplates, causing the muscle to remake the defective endplate again.

Pin and Stretch Massage

This is similar to Deep Stroking Massage in that your fingers run along the length of the muscle and work through the resistance of the TrP, but the stretch is applied gradually after the nodularity is encountered.

1. Patient should be positioned so that the muscle being treated can be moved through its range of motion.
2. The trigger point is found and the muscle put in a slackened position.
3. Slowly, the tension is increased, and pressure is exerted against the trigger point.
4. The muscle is stretched, while maintaining pressure on the TrP.
5. The stroke is then continued down the length of the muscle.