

Without Awareness There Is No Choice

by John F. Barnes, PT

Imagine you were injured a couple of years ago. You received on-going therapy in the form of hot packs, ultrasound, massage, electrical stimulation, exercise and flexibility training, joint mobilization and muscle energy techniques, medication and psychological counseling to no avail. All of the standard tests show nothing and you desperately want to get better.

You've been given a multitude of different diagnostic labels and all the experts are telling you there is nothing wrong. You feel imprisoned in a body that won't respond and allow you to play and work again. You feel helpless and out of control. What if something was overlooked? What could it be?

THE INSTINCTUAL "FREEZE RESPONSE"

When many of us are injured, we go into a state of disassociation at the moment of trauma to survive. Our body/mind experiences an instinctive "freeze response" and this positional, physiological memory becomes indelibly imprinted into our mind/body awareness. The sympathetic and parasympathetic autonomic nervous systems become stuck in a state of hyper arousal that is not under our voluntary control. It is like having your foot on the accelerator of a car and the other foot on the brake. This consumes an enormous amount of energy and eventually exhausts us.

Because this positional memory becomes disassociated and locked in our subconscious, we have no awareness of it and without conscious awareness, we have no control of it.

This "freeze response", over time, creates holding or bracing patterns that eventually produce increased chronic muscular tone, spasm, and myofascial restrictions that eventually become symptoms.

Traditionally, therapy focuses on symptoms, explaining why modalities, exercise, joint mobilization and muscle energy techniques, massage and/or medicine can, many times, only produce poor or temporary results.

Why didn't good psychological counseling help? Possibly because the majority of psychological therapy is done in consensus consciousness. In other words, "talk therapy" and analysis are focused on the conscious level and the cause of the chronic symptom complex is on the instinctual level, which is not accessed by words and analysis, or for that matter by traditional therapeutic interventions or medicine.

What can help this state of disassociation? Myofascial Release and Myofascial Unwinding.

Myofascial restrictions do not show up in any of the standard tests, so myofascial restrictions that solidify these chronic holding or freeze response patterns in our bodies are missed or misdiagnosed in health care.

Myofascial Release frees these powerful, structural restrictions that place enormous pressure upon sensitive structures that produce pain, headaches and restrictions of motion. And Myofascial Unwinding (the motion facilitation component of the Myofascial Release Approach) guides the patient into significant positions of past traumas.

In the safety of the therapeutic environment, the therapist gently holds the patient in these significant positions of past trauma. In these therapeutic positions, the patient's tissue memory releases the instinctual bracing patterns. The "freeze response" is then deactivated, which allows for continued structural release and elimination of symptoms.

The release of tissue memory creates awareness to return the patient to conscious choice and control of his or her destiny. The patient can then progress toward the ultimate goal of healing and health.

Reference: Levine, Peter, Waking the Tiger Healing Trauma; North Atlantic Books., Berkeley 1997