

Your Back–Pain Questions, Answered

Part 3: Muscle Issues

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What Are the “Knots” in My Back Muscles?

According to current research, those “knots” are a great example of your nervous and musculoskeletal system working together in an attempt to protect you. Your body has ways of adapting to more stress than is optimal. It can change the way areas of your body feel and how sensitive your tissues are. It can even alter the way you move by making your soft tissues tender in certain spots and potentially causing altered muscle function or keeping certain muscles tense.

The knots are most likely a sign of some underlying problem rather than the true cause of your pain. That problem can be more complicated and consist of many contributing factors. Some could include:

- an injury elsewhere in your body
- a history of overuse and overload on particular muscles
- a general lack of movement and exercise that bodily tissues need and crave
- sustained sitting or standing positions that lead to decreased blood and oxygen supply to an area
- an overload of emotional stress
- work, life and relationship related stresses
- several nights of poor sleep.

Your body’s protective systems are quite intricate and looking at all possible factors can help you to better understand what might be causing pain. Just focusing on the knots might have temporary relief but won’t address the cause of the issue.



Can Massage Fix My Back Pain?

While a massage can feel quite good during and shortly after treatment, the vast majority of medical evidence demonstrates that there are no long-term benefits from massage and that it is not a good stand-alone treatment for back pain.

Commonly touted benefits from massages include improved blood flow, changes to lymphatic flow, stretching the fascia, detoxification, reduction of inflammation, breaking up “adhesions” or “knots,” and improved tissue healing. However, none of these have been conclusively shown to underlie the benefits of massage in research.

The general scientific consensus currently is that the positive benefits from a massage are very likely from inducing relaxation and decreasing stress. This is not to be taken lightly, since stress and emotional “tenseness” can be a significant contributor to chronic medical issues such as depression, chronic pain, low back pain, etc.

Massage can be a good supplemental treatment for short-term pain relief, but it should always be paired with an active care plan that involves movement and exercise to build your resilience. Other lifestyle modifications can contribute to this change as well.

It’s also important to recognise and evaluate other factors that contribute to your experience of pain. These could include excessive career, financial or relationship related stress, sustained body positions, emotional factors, and other health issues.

Can Massage Fix My Back Pain?

It is commonly thought that back pain can be caused by tight muscles. But many research studies show that the flexibility of muscles or mobility of joints does not have a close relationship with the onset or presence of back pain.

