Understanding the messages of Your Joints

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PART TWO

Why Do Joints Hurt?

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Causes of Pain

A joint is endowed with an elaborate and finely tuned nervous system. Movement mechanisms are very subtle. Walking, for example, requires that the joints of the lower and upper extremities, the vertebral column, the pelvis, and even the organs move at the same time. In order for walking to be neither halting nor expending of excessive energy, these parts of the body must continuously and concomitantly exchange information with the brain. When a joint suffers, its tremendous sensitivity automatically sends millions of negative impulses to the pain centers of the brain.

Joint pain has numerous origins. I will present each one briefly before offering a more in-depth study in the chapters that follow.

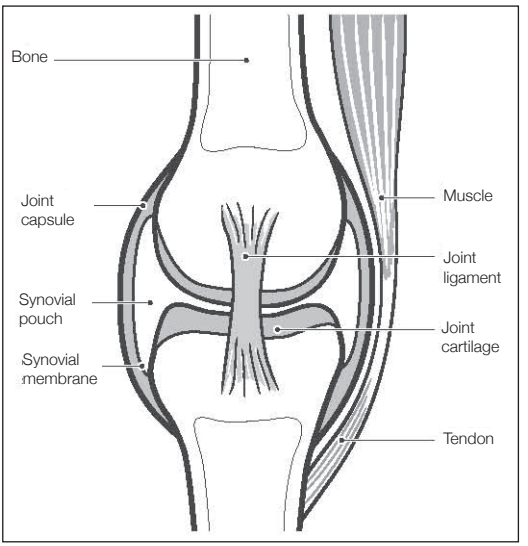

Fig. 01: Joint

Traumatism

It is easy to understand how a fall, an accident, and acts of physical aggression in general can create joint problems. Lesions can be cartilaginous, osseous, ligamentous, or muscular. They can involve tears, bruises, edema, swelling, joint locking, bleeding, etc. Keep in mind that a joint problem can arise far from the site of traumatic impact due to the "collision" force generated by the shock when it hits the body. This collision energy travels through and across the body before stopping at a location where it produces a sprain, fracture, or lesion that affects a bone or an organ.

Rheumatism

Rheumatism is a term used for the pain associated with inflammatory or degenerative processes seen in the joints, muscles, and connective tissues. Rheumatism is a favored topic in the over-sixty age group. "My rheumatism is acting up" is a common social expression that reinforces the notion that rheumatism is just a fact of life that must be endured. However, the rheumatoid variety of arthrosis can exist before any symptoms manifest, and it sometimes comes on prematurely in the young.

Poor Diet

Dietary habits affect joints indirectly. Everything that the body has trouble eliminating gradually changes acidity levels. Waste products created and accumulated by the organism have a tendency to land in the soft tissue surrounding joints. Specifically:

- the joint capsule. This protective envelope normally maintains a negative pressure, creating a sort of void that facilitates cartilage sliding.
- the synovial pouch. The internal part of the capsule produces synovial fluid. Synovial effusion causes swelling around the knee. Synovial fluid is like oil to our joints. In a car, low oil levels cause the motor to overheat. Metal parts can twist and buckle to the point of breaking. Similarly, if there is insufficient synovial lubricant in our joints, they overheat, swell, and stiffen up.

Hormonal Imbalances

Joints are made up of bone and cartilage surrounded by a capsule, syno-

vial fluid, ligaments, and muscles. Thus constructed, they react to all that affects their environment. The soft tissue surrounding joints is hormone-sensitive. Hormonal imbalances, which mainly affect women, can cause muscle and tendon problems as well as joint dysfunctions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, rhizarthrosis, and arthrosis of the hip. An imbalance of estrogen and progesterone is usually implicated, as fluctuations are especially pronounced during menopause. Similarly, hormonal surges during puberty can cause knee pain in young adolescent women.

Menopausal estrogen/progesterone imbalances (usually the effect of deficient progesterone) cause the soft tissue surrounding the joints to become stiffer and "fibrosed," and thus painful. Additionally, certain menopausal medications congest the venous and lymphatic systems, provoking cyclical pelvic pain accompanied by lumbago.

"What I have is not complicated," Jeanne, 53, declared. "All my joints hurt." Palpating and mobilizing her shoulders, wrists, elbows, knees, and spine all triggered pain. On the other hand, while movements were painful, they were still possible.

Radiographs showed nothing more than slight innocuous arthrosis. Jeanne had not had a menstrual cycle in two years. It is important to keep in mind that menopause is a process not limited to the last menstrual period. Familiar effects can last from two to three years, sometimes longer. These may include hot flashes, sweats, emotional ups and downs, as well as digestive, skin, and joint problems. In Jeanne's case, it is useless to hope for results by manipulating the vertebral column and other joints. It is necessary to work with the organs of the liver, intestines, kidneys, and uterus. It also is important to give general recommendations such as taking up swimming and stretching, and consuming soy and citrus fruit.

In Relationship to Our Organs

It generally can be said that any organs might be involved in joint pain should they have trouble carrying out their role of providing for the major functions of the body. Nevertheless, in forty years of practice, I have observed that some organs have more influence than others (see page 56).

The Emotions

Everything is related. The human body is a complex mechanism of

interconnections and exchanges between systems: articular, nervous, endocrine, respiratory, vascular, digestive, genital, and more. The brain is capable of receiving ten billion bits of information a second. Cells depend on each other as they harmoniously organize to ensure the homeostasis that is vital to all major functions.

Cells also communicate with our emotional system. The limbic system is that group of brain structures involved in memory and emotion. It unites the olfactory pathways (smell is very important in emotion), the amygdala, hippocampus, septum (partition), and the corpus callosum. Note that the cerebellum is also a player in analyzing our emotions and the reactions they cause. This part of the brain is involved in memory too.

Short-term memory loss is common after trauma, especially what is known as "rabbit punch" impact (see p. 122). Suppose you suffer from recurrent joint pain. Such pain will send negative messages to your brain, which in turn will wake up other messages previously recorded and stored. The brain has a propensity to store the negative. People who suffer from insomnia are quite aware of this. When we cannot sleep during the night, our thoughts are rarely positive. We ruminate over intangible problems and conflicts that seem difficult, if not impossible, to resolve.

Philippe found himself the victim of a seemingly mild car accident that triggered cervical pain. Several days later he developed a stomachache. Philippe saw no connection between the two. Nevertheless, osteopathic questioning revealed a link. The cervical pain reverberated to the area of the brain where the emotional shock of his parents' divorce lay dormant. The family breakup had caused a stomach ulcer. This point on the stomach became his "weak point."

In its desire to rid itself of accumulated negative messages, the brain discharges the stress. It does this by using in reverse the same nerve pathways by which the trauma reached the brain, even if this amplifies the neck pain. The old stomachache wakes up, and a depressive emotional phase is initiated. The fact that emotions generate physical pain is no longer in doubt. We have all experienced it.

The body cannot be dissociated from spirit and emotion. They are totally interdependent. Modern man has invented nothing new as to emotion. The closest we have come is to develop scanners able to detect areas of the brain that are stimulated and activated by emotion and information

receptor sites.

Emotions cause the body to react in a way that has important repercussions for health. We know how much stress, anger, anxiety, and depression can harm our organisms. Before symptoms worsen and cause physical deterioration or a weakened immune system, it is preferable to find antidotes other than medications. Emotional support will someday be established within the scope of practice of therapists who deal with physical pain. Doctors increasingly find themselves integrating emotional factors in the practice of medicine at the behest of their patients.

As described above, our entire emotional experience is stored in the limbic system of our brain. In my earlier book, *Understanding the Messages of Your Body*, I explained the brain as being like any other organ in its effort to rid itself of emotional tension.

When we live through painful, dangerous, or conflicting situations, every brain cell reacts to the emotional upheaval. These very real experiences enter the realm of the unconscious, where they lie dormant unless and until the slightest emotional stimulation might awaken them.

At the age of seven Sophie was violently awakened by a thunderstorm. Alone in her room, she was terribly afraid. Her parents were not near; they were playing cards at the neighbors. Her terror of thunderstorms continued in the form of nightmares up to age eighteen. Around age forty she found herself riding home on a bike when a thunderstorm struck. Heavy rain caused her bike to skid on the wet road. She fell and hurt her knees and hands. Once she picked herself up, she was seized with panic. The memory of the stormy childhood night came rushing back. From then on a double connection was established: Whenever her knees hurt, even with mild swelling, she experienced fear. Knee pain became forever linked to her cerebral fear centers.

Having her knee treated was enough to eliminate part of the viscous knee-pain cycle. She had no wish to consult a psychologist since her condition had become more or less tolerable.

We often interpret messages from our bodies as a function of our knowledge, which is inevitably limited and culturally adapted. The brain is an extremely mysterious organ. Nobody can explain how this physical mass is able to think, or where and how it forms thoughts. The brain trades in

billions of pieces of information in a manner still far from our comprehension. When the brain receives a stress, it stores it away in a small corner. The brain is in continuous communication with the body, receiving and emitting information. Messages are sent out to all parts of the body, including the organs and joints.

Our joint system reacts to physical aggression as well as to the discharge of nerve impulses coming from the brain. Feeling emotionally ill at ease can trigger digestive problems such as stomach trouble, or it can set off joint pain. The pain can be in a joint that suffered in the past, or it can be a new problem arising from emotional behavior or posture, like slouching. In manual therapy it is important that we avoid thinking of joint pain as being invariably mechanical.

An Energetic Problem

To carry out its function, the organism uses energy from food we eat, air we breathe, our genetic inheritance, the electromagnetic field, energy from the brain, and doubtless innumerable unknown factors. Our muscles and joints require energy to work. In times of illness, significant fatigue, organ dysfunction, worry, or exposure to an area of electromagnetic disturbance, we can feel the effects and repercussions in our joint system. A sprain, inflammation, or locked joint can show up as a consequence of a drop in energy.

To regain lost energy it is advisable that we sleep more, avoid overeating in the evening, take suitable homeopathic remedies, and drink chamomile tea. We easily can become mentally fatigued and not tired enough physically. To counter this, you may consider walking home briskly from work and taking some time to yourself to listen to music rather than the continuous and frequently negative news cycle.

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