

Ergonomics of Asian Bodywork Therapy

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During a recent teaching trip around Europe, I stared transfixed as young women in Rome teetered and stumbled in their impossibly skinny high heels across cobblestones and broken sidewalks. Where the women saw "high fashion," I just saw potentially twisted and broken ankles, knee stiffness, lower back pain and postural distortions. When I complimented one woman who removed her shoes and padded along cobblestones barefoot, she smiled and said, "aaah, I'm Irish" as though that explained everything.

I described these hilarious observations during my Continuing Education Pain workshops in Zuerich and Munich, while offering a simple checklist of the most common sources of everyday pain in our clients. I advised everyone to empower their clients to develop an awareness to maximize every bodywork session.

Do any of the following dozen profiles and tips sound familiar?

Are high fashion-statement shoes worth those many aches and pains, especially among clients whose jobs require hours of standing? Clients seldom make the connection. It's helpful to discuss options or suggest clients carry a second comfy pair of shoes.

Computer-related back, neck, wrist or shoulder problems? Ask clients to email you video clips or digital shots of their computer work stations and work patterns. Then it's easy to pinpoint distortions prompted by uncomfortable work postures and desk arrangements. I helped one client ease a stiff and painful neck problem by suggesting she move her monitor from the side to the front of her desk to avoid working long hours with her head in a fixed position facing left. She had never made the connection.

Morning backpain? Ask clients (and their long suffering partners) when they last changed their mattress. One client wailed, "Oh we cant change our mattress. Sure it's lumpy and sags in the middle. But it was our first love nest in college." Ho hum, I sighed, well, I suggested, why not have fun trying out some different mattress or futon options and create a new love nest you can enjoy without backpain?

Daily headaches? I advise, keep a daily journal to time the headaches and pinpoint a source, a seasonal or food allergy, or a skipped meal, computer overload, a spat with a spouse or work colleague, notched up stress, or long distant driving or frequent air travel. One of my headache clients kept a journal and realized the culprit was his daily chocolate bar.

Long hours in a kitchen prompting leg pain or other problems? How about a wheeled high stool? Are the counters too high? Too low? Again ask clients to submit video clips or shots of their kitchen layout and work patterns. One client's severe respiratory problems reflected the poor ventilation in the restaurant kitchen where he worked. Everything changed when the owner realized he could reduce absenteeism and a high turnover in his kitchen staff if he upgraded his ventilation system.

Do dancers or performing artists seek your help for a variety of structural problems? Go and watch

them perform. Take careful notes. I realized that one modern dancer client was suffering because her performance involved slamming the floor with her elbow, knee or shoulder joints. I winced, watching her. Later I suggested some Tai Chi or Aikido training so she could develop softer and more fluid ways of hitting the floor, a whole new choreography that she welcomed.

Has a violinist or viola player sought your help for neck pains? I helped one violinist by suggesting some passive upper body and neck stretches, and to spend time everyday resting his head on a cushion on his right shoulder, to balance the distortion caused by hours with his neck tilted to the left on his violin. This helped ease his problems in a couple of weeks.

One of my clients was a piano teacher who suffered from hip pain because of all the hours seated on a piano stool. I suggested a walk around her neighborhood each morning before she started teaching to avoid becoming "locked" in a seated position. After a few weeks one of her neighbors asked her what she was doing because she seemed so different, her step seemed so free. "Shiatsu," she told him. "I want some of that," he said, and brought his entire family for sessions.

Are kids seeking your help for "text neck" or "text thumbs" caused by over texting habits on their smartphones? We're seeing more of more of this problem. Spend time at a sidewalk cafe and observe body postures when texting. "Text neck" can be eased if users just raise their arms or prop their elbows on a table if they must text during mealtimes. "Text thumbs" can be eased if users would only use their other fingers.

How about school kids who have neck and upperback pains caused by overloading their backpacks? Get a backpack on wheels I suggested to one young client. "Oh that's soooo uncool!" he moaned. "Make it cool," I advised. "Google or create a cool model and start a trend." He did!

My lawn cutter complained of chronic back pain so I watched him work, advised him on more creative back-friendly ways of hauling his lawn mower off his truck, and brought him into student clinic as a guinea pig. I also noticed he consumed vast quantities of soda pop. I persuaded him to stock up on water and fruit juice to keep himself hydrated while working in the intense Texas heat. He now keeps water and green tea in an ice chest on his truck and swears this is the main reason he is now pain-free.

While out shopping in a health food store I noticed one of the assistants was in the throes of an asthma attack. I approached and held her Lung 1 points. They had an immediate calming effect, and freed her breathing. She now uses these points for herself the instant she feels an attack approaching. I have always found it most effective to treat Lung 1 together with arm rotations, when the asthmatic client is standing or sitting, and always share this dynamic with my students.

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