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Health

## For Better Health: Specialist Shares Simple Self-Care Techniques To Alleviate Pain

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Nearly two dozen people experiencing different degrees of pain gathered in the C.H. Booth Library's Meeting Room on September 12 to learn techniques they can use to help alleviate their body's constant soreness and discomfort.

Janet Schroeder, a chronic pain specialist with more than 25 years of experience, led the program that demonstrated simple and safe methods people can try at home, even if they are by themselves.

At her practice, Integrated Pain & Stress Relief in Bethel, she offers a holistic approach to wellness by using a combination of therapies, including stretching, positional release, trigger point therapy, and CranioSacral Therapy (CST).

“These are techniques that anybody can do. There’s no downside, no risk,” Ms Schroeder prefaced before calling up her first volunteer.

## **Stretching**

Walking to the front of the room, where the portable massage table was set up, volunteer Christine DePalma explained to Ms Schroeder that she has a tightness in her hamstrings, especially on the right side.

Ms Schroeder had Ms DePalma lay with her back flat on the table while raising her right leg up in the air.

Holding Ms DePalma’s right foot, she slowly stretched the leg up more, making sure to do so gently so as to not exacerbate the muscle.

“When you go slow and steady, you get a much better stretch,” Ms Schroeder said.

A person should never push themselves to the point where they are contorting their face in pain when stretching, because that it is a sign they are doing it incorrectly, she added.

The time that the stretch is held for is also crucial, because a 30-second stretch will not give the same benefits as a 120-second stretch can.

“There’s a part of your muscle called the muscle spindle that takes two minutes to reset to a longer length,” Ms Schroeder explained.

By practicing the stretch for two minutes, it will help loosen the muscle and alleviate the pain from muscle tightness.

Ms Schroeder noted that this method can also be modified if someone is alone by using a rope, or even a dog’s leash, to place around the sole of the foot while holding both ends of the rope, then slowly pulling to increase the stretch.

After the demonstration, Ms Schroeder asked how Ms DePalma was feeling, to which she replied, “It doesn’t hurt as much as it did.”

## **Positional Release**

“When we stretch a muscle, we pull the ends away from each other and, in a sense, you are creating more tension,” Ms Schroeder said while transitioning to the next technique. “With positional release, you bring the ends closer together, so it softens the muscle.”

To show an example of a positional release method for hamstrings, Ms DePalma laid on her stomach with her chin over the table's edge.

Ms Schroeder felt the spot in the muscle that was tender and bent Ms DePalma's leg up at a 90-degree angle for a two-minute hold.

"It may not take the pain completely away, but it will usually minimize it," Ms Schroeder said.

Originally, Ms DePalma said her pain, on a scale of one to ten, the latter being the most intense, was at an eight, but after the positional release, she said it was reduced all the way to a two.

Next, volunteer Jim Ferrara had his thigh pain diminished from a six to a two from a positional release method.

Ms Schroeder had him lay on his back with his legs up and bent over a chair as she focused on applying gentle pressure to his muscle for two minutes.

For volunteer Gail Diminico's back pain and shoulder soreness, Ms Schroeder placed rolled towels underneath her hips and shoulders to lift the points of the body. The height of the towels can be adjusted depending on how the body responds to the technique.

After having slight pressure applied to the back for two minutes, Ms Diminico said she could barely feel the pain anymore.

Similarly, positional release worked for Patricia Campbell, who has pain in her right shoulder blade. She was instructed to lay on her stomach with towels under her shoulders while Ms Schroeder applied pressure to her upper back.

"For positional release, you probably have to do a few times a day," she explained. Even though it has a great success rate, the pain can be alleviated for anywhere from ten minutes to a few hours.

### **Trigger Point Therapy**

A trigger point may not be detectable on an MRI or x-ray, but everyone has them, and when you find it, you know undoubtedly you found it.

"What they are, are highly sensitized points on your body," Ms Schroeder said.

During the class, she passed around a trigger point chart and showed everyone how to locate a spot on their forearm. She instructed everyone to extend their arm out with their palm down then feel along the inner elbow for their trigger point.

With that method in mind, she helped volunteer Karen Nagy reduce the pain she experiences in her left elbow by doing a combination of trigger point therapy, positional release, then a stretch.

## **CranialSacral Therapy**

Ms Nagy also benefited from CST, which is a self-care technique that releases the cerebral spinal fluid to eliminate pain.

Ms Schroeder said she does this “profoundly relaxing” method on all her patients and has found it brings relief to even her most extreme cases.

“What I find with anybody with any type of chronic pain, anyone who doesn’t sleep at night, anyone who is stressed out, everyone with TMJ, everyone with ringing in the ears, everyone with sinus issues, when I look at their cranial bones, they don’t line up,” she said.

“If the bones are slightly off and at an angle to each other,” she added, “it creates vectors of force, so there is a lot of compression, and all the nerves that are in there are being stimulated and excited, so there is very little ability to relax.”

Before Ms Schroeder began the CranioSacral Therapy, she had a volunteer verify that there was a visible difference in the sides of Ms Nagy’s jaw and check bones, with one side higher than the other.

While Ms Nagy laid on her back, Ms Schroeder strategically placed her hands on the back of Ms Nagy’s head for two minutes, feeling the pulsing and releasing of pressure during the hold.

Afterward, Ms Nagy was more aligned, and when she moved her jaw, she said, “It feels much better... [and] it was very relaxing.”

For those interested in trying CST at home, Ms Schroeder advises purchasing a tool called a “still point inducer” that can be place on the back of the head when laying down.

While Ms Schroeder said she cannot promise that these different methods she taught today will be a complete cure, they have proven time and again to relieve people’s pain temporarily.

“All of these [techniques] can be used in combination — maybe a stretch is better for your legs, but a positional release is better for your neck. You can combine them in any way shape or form with other traditional therapy... there’s virtually no downside,” she said.

*For more information about self-care techniques to alleviate pain, contact Janet Schroeder at 203-240-0378 or e-mail [janet@integratedpainandstressrelief.com](mailto:janet@integratedpainandstressrelief.com).*

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