

# **Knots in my Neck the Size of Golf Balls**

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Needless to say, we've all come across stressful situations in our lives, and perhaps even more so now with a high unemployment rate, and a challenging economy. So when my wife offers to give me a shoulder massage to help with those stressful days, I'm more than happy to take her up on the offer. But sometimes it feels like I have golf ball size knots in my neck and shoulders, which make me jump out of my chair. These are called trigger points, and they can be quite painful.

Trigger points are focal areas that are located in tight muscles groups that can present anywhere on the body, but are predominately in those anti gravity muscles such as the neck, shoulders, and back. There are two types of trigger points: active and latent, depending on the characteristics. The active type causes pain at rest and is tender to the touch and will create a referred pattern of pain in the surrounding areas. A latent trigger point may only cause pain with applied pressure, but may restrict movement or cause muscle weakness.

Most researchers agree that small repetitive microscopic trauma leads to the development of trigger points. Prolonged poor posture, poor body mechanics, lack of exercise, or too much exercise, and repetitive strain on muscles due to work such as being on a computer all day, picking up boxes, or holding a telephone between the ear and shoulder to free the arms may lead to trigger points. Even the wrong kind of mattress or pillow could be the culprit.

Trigger points may cause tension headaches, or lead to more sinister problems, such as full muscle tears, like an Achilles tendon rupture, so ignore them at your own peril. The most ideal option is to avoid them all together, and there are basic principles to do so. Keep your muscles loose and supple by frequently stretching, maintain good posture when sitting or standing, take frequent breaks during prolonged activity.

Persistent trigger points may be only a symptom of a bigger problem like Fibromyalgia, or a spastic muscle due to a back herniation but nevertheless, there are effective treatment options. Your Physical Therapist may use:

- Therapeutic Ultrasound to increase blood flow and soften the fibrous tissue that is the trigger point.
- Laser therapy is quickly becoming the new modality of choice for its effective anti-inflammatory and tissue repairing capabilities.
- Electrical Stimulation: will decrease spasticity in those tight and overworked muscles.
- Spray and Stretch Technique: involves stretching a target muscle while simultaneously applying cooling spray, the sudden drop in skin temp decreases the pain sensation and spasm.

There are pharmaceutical options such as muscle relaxants that are sometimes prescribed, as well as trigger point injections that inject a local anesthetic into the site.

So remember, your aches and pains may simply be trigger point pain, but that pain could be a symptom of other problems, so please take advantage of a Free Evaluation at Trinity Rehab to determine if you suffer or at risk of developing trigger points. Call Trinity Rehab at 732 219-5700.