

I'VE BEEN SEARCHING MY SOLEUS TONIGHT

Managing old aches and pains with ease

ERIC HAD BEEN paddling all his life, but over the past few months his shoulder had started aching occasionally.

While running the Ottawa River, he was trashed by a wave — nothing unusual, but he felt a pull in his shoulder when he rolled. He let the shoulder recover for a few weeks before returning to the river. The pain came back. At 45, Eric thought that old age had caught up with him and it was time to stop paddling. He told friends that although it wasn't a big deal, he could no longer paddle comfortably. So Eric hung up his paddle.

Have you heard this kind of conversation before? Health professionals hear countless variations of the story that involves an athlete avoiding their favourite activity because of inexplicable pain. Without ever being diagnosed, they gave up their sport for years until someone suggested that something could be done.

Many are amazed and energized to find out that the problem isn't about age. After all, look at the number of active, pain-free individuals enjoying their sports as 70- and 80-year-olds. Often, it's the result of a particular kind of stress on the body. Sometimes taking a passive approach to pain makes it feel like "just part of life."

Pain may be the result of something you have been doing to your body. It's never a factor of age or "inevitability." Always there's something you can do to treat it.

The injuries that spark feelings of fatalism (especially in older athletes)



are those injuries like Eric's that seem unconnected to a particular event. Most people are familiar with one particular kind of pain — an acute injury due to a sudden overload on a tissue. These injuries include sprains, strains, sudden blows or hits, and are evident because of the redness, swelling, pain and heat radiating from the damaged tissue. Anyone with basic first aid is familiar with the RICE approach for treating injuries: Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation. But, what about pain that doesn't leave any apparent physical evidence?

Here's the full story... While acute injury is the most obvious cause of pain, it is only one of three mechanisms that can generate musculoskeletal discomfort. The other two mechanisms are described professionally as "repetitive strain" or "prolonged static contractions." Informally, they are known as "impediments to fun." Repetitive strain injuries are caused by repeated microtrauma to a tissue. Initially these don't cause redness, swelling, heat or pain. These injuries are most common with sports, work or hobbies where some part of the body is put through a repetitive motion. Examples of hobbies that might generate repetitive strain are running, cycling, swimming or keyboarding. Even though pain is not felt when the microtrauma initially occurs, scar tissue builds up slowly and becomes tight and restricted, and pain slowly enters the picture.

Static contractions are the stationary version of the same injury. Instead of doing a traumatic motion over and over, they involve holding an injury-causing posture for a prolonged period of time. Static contractions will partially restrict

blood flow to the muscles involved in holding the posture. When this occurs, your body will send cells to the area that begin to deposit fibrous connective tissue. This problem will occur with poor postural habits, whether they are chronic postural habits, improper posture while playing sports, poor occupational postures, or even poor sleep postures.

While the source of repetitive strain injuries or prolonged static contraction injuries is not as obvious as acute injuries, the results are the same for all three. Scar tissue builds up around and within the soft tissue. Eventually the tissue becomes tight, knotted and weakened, and nerves may become entrapped. In this scarred state, the tissues can cause pain, numbness, tingling, pain radiating to other parts of the body, and restricted motion. If left alone, the tissue becomes more prone to acute injury — like when you "inexplicably" roll your ankle while out for a jog — and compensations in other parts of the body may develop. Meanwhile, the problem will get worse, and harder to rehabilitate if left untreated.

If this scenario of mysterious pain and reduced mobility sounds familiar, you might be on the brink of what's known in therapy as a "eureka" moment. Athletic and psychological therapies are not as far apart as one might think, and finding the source of pain is the first step towards banishing it.

Risk factors that may contribute to musculoskeletal problems include:

- Poor diet
- Training errors
- Technique errors
- Environment
- Old injuries
- Muscle imbalances in strength or flexibility
- Improper equipment
- Poor ergonomics
- Psychological stress

The best guide for your journey towards happy and pain-free activity is always a health professional who is licensed to render a diagnosis for musculoskeletal conditions, such as a medical doctor or chiropractor. Sports medicine specialists and chiropractors who specialize in sports injuries are

often the most experienced, and those with additional training in soft tissue management will be the most helpful.

Active Release Technique® is a soft tissue therapy developed specifically to deal with these types of problems (www.activerelease.com). Make sure you choose a professional who is experienced in managing sports or occupational soft tissue injuries to get the benefit of specialized techniques. An army of massage therapists, physiotherapists, athletic therapists and chiropractors are waiting to help treat the source of your pain.

However, there's no substitute for prevention. Activities that help you monitor tension and restrictions in your body are a huge factor in preventing musculoskeletal pains. You can monitor tension easily through activities that require strength, balance, and flexibility like yoga, Pilates, or ball stability classes. Activities like stretching are the best way to prevent scar tissue from building up between tissue layers.

These same activities are also a good way of preventing a certain rigidity in approach to athletics. While you might have never considered maintenance stretching to be as important as strength and power to athletic success, any health professional will tell you that scar tissue must always be dealt with before strengthening an area because it inhibits a muscle's ability to fully contract.

So, if you find yourself repeating the same activities and encountering the same pain, don't simply stop the activity! There are always ways to break down barriers to activity with the help of health professionals who know how to find flexible solutions. And the more flexible you are, mentally and physically, the stronger you'll be able to become.

Dr. Geoff Outerbridge is a chiropractor, ergonomics consultant, and Active Release Technique® provider who treats occupational and sports-related musculoskeletal problems. He lives and active outdoor life in the Ottawa area. He may be contacted at 521-5355, or www.holisticclinic.ca.

www.cleanliving.net

Clean Living Specialists INC.
SINCE 1988

~Floors washed by hand every time
~Baseboards washed regularly
~Furniture moved, pictures dusted & so much more...

Weekly
Biweekly
Monthly
No obligation
Excellent references

613-860-0436

QUALITY - INTEGRITY - SERVICE

Relax A Chair

- Float on air and relax in comfort and style in your relax-a-chair
- Your own hanging, swinging, hammock-style chair
- Great for Cottages, Yachts, Fishing, Patio, Deck, Pergola, Basement, Tree....anywhere!
- Easy and quick to set-up
- Light weight and totally portable!
- Can hold up to 450lbs
- Comes with Armrests, Footrest and Drink-holder. A Sun visor is optional.

Order yours TODAY for the summer!

View online at www.relaxachair.com
and order at tel: 416-562 9096 or
email us at relaxachair@rogers.com



REGULAR PRICE: \$169.
SPECIAL MAGAZINE PRICE ONLY \$139