

Crossed Wires and the Super “Ouchy” Problem

Are you an intuitive person? I am, so one day, I asked my intuition what I should know about the super ouchy client, the one whose pain goes from zero to sixty in less than a breath. This is the client who I can inadvertently hurt, with no warning to me. When I asked this question, I got an image of wires that are crossed. I understood that it stood for pain messages that are mixed up. And these are not crossed wires in the brain, they are crossed wires in the body itself. Now, of course, as a practiced intuitive person, I had to put this into the perspective of science in order to glean the real value of the image.

I already knew that certain people experience central sensitization. This is the person who has been bombarded by pain, trauma or stress and the body can no longer tell what is dangerous and what is not. What is surprising to a massage therapist is that when I hit a super ouchy point on such a client, their body will react as if I used incredibly deep pressure, even if the pressure was mild. I talk to these clients about how massage can “stir things up” and how I will need to use a lighter touch to avoid making things worse.

Yet, there is more to it than that. The mind and body create a trauma response, inflammation, in an area that only receives mild physical stimulation. The nervous system sends pain signals to the brain and the outcome is the same as if a trauma had actually occurred. What does this mean? What does it mean for the super ouchy client and perhaps more interestingly, what does it mean for the rest of us? What does it mean to live in a human body?

Let’s turn first to the super ouchy client. It always seems that the big ouchy response, hyperalgesia, is a sort of overwhelm to the nervous system. My approach with such a client is to do what I can to give positive, healing input in a slow, gentle way. I thereby help retrain the nervous system to be able to cope with sensation. I have seen clients lose the hyperalgesia with a combination of self care, medical care and massage therapy. One of these clients was so sensitive that she experienced discomfort when I was moving my fingers off, but right above the skin. With lots of self care, weekly massage and medical interventions, such as medication and botox injections, she was able to break the pain cycle and now can enjoy medium and even deep pressure during massage.

The focus with the super ouchy client is to soothe, but not ignore the hot spots in order to create a new normal. In addition, it is vital to identify the root cause of the dysfunction. For many people, the root cause is unbalanced posture or injury or both. The super ouchy hot spot is simply a trigger point,¹ an area where the muscle fibers have created taut bands with bound up fascia. The unrelenting contraction of muscle fibers and fascia cuts off blood flow, creating a kind of enclave of guarded tissue that is blocked from the healing chemicals that would naturally bring health to the area. This guarding will stop with correct posture and interventions that will open up the area in ways that will bring in healthy blood flow.

¹ Advancing Musculoskeletal Diagnosis And Therapy: A Comprehensive Review Of Trigger Point Theory And Muscle Pain Patterns, Tianjun Zhai, Fengyan Jiang, Yeping Chen, Jie Wang, Wei Feng, Front Med. (Jul 10, 2024).

Interestingly, not every person loses the experience of tender spots. Those who have conditions like fibromyalgia or Ehlers Danlos Syndrome may have to manage their hot spots and do more than postural balance. I had one client with fibromyalgia who was able to break the cycle of constant pain. She told me that now, when she feels pain, it is a message from her body that she is doing too much and must rest. She described herself as a Type A personality and was having to manage both her physical pain and her mental instinct to push through the pain. In her case, she grew as a person from having her condition.

It would be a beautiful world if every person could experience that kind of inner empowerment from a painful experience. I know that the world is messier than that. Nonetheless, I also know that when we do hard things, especially when they are motivated by kindness, including self-kindness, the result is a kind of growth in self empowerment. This kind of shift in habit and focus also challenges us to bring a kind of refresh to our own perception of our identity. In James Clear's book, "Atomic Habits," he not only explains this process of identity shift in creating new habits, he advises people to create the identity of the kind of person who has that desired habit as part of the habit formation.

Here is the challenge to any of us who have unbalanced posture. Can you transform your identity to one who does the (sometimes hard) work to maintain a healthy posture and healthy body, even though you might be stressed, tired or overwhelmed by the magnitude of work and focus involved? If this interests you, take a look at "Atomic Habits". It is an instruction manual for habit formation.

Those of you who are experiencing super ouchy hot spots, they are your call to action to partner with medical professionals, body workers and your own willingness to learn and make changes. I believe that our bodies are meant to be healthy and feel good. I wish I could bring that to all people. I also know that the kind of utopia where we are all healthy and feel great doesn't exist. In truth, many of us experience deep challenge, deserving of deep compassion and kindness. Yet, that leaves the question, is it time for you to make changes? Is it time for you to take action to make things better for yourself? I hope so.

Now, let's turn our attention from the super ouchy client to the broader population. Our bodies, our means of gathering information for the brain, have the power to fool the brain into reacting as if something is true, regardless of the actual reality of the situation. Let's go back to what I said in the beginning. The nervous system of the super ouchy client is sending signals to the brain that a trauma has occurred, when in truth, the physical stimulation was mild. The brain and body react as if the trauma had occurred, creating inflammation and muscle and fascia guarding in the area. Can human beings use this process of fooling the brain to bring better outcomes? The answer is yes.

Certainly, we've all heard of the approach to "fake it til you make it" when feeling impostor syndrome (why does everything have to be a syndrome?). Does this work with the body as well? It does. Here's a reality shift. Science now tells us that reality as we know it is simply a projection from our brains. Dr. Daniel Yon states in BBC Science Focus Magazine² that our experience of reality is just a projection of what the mind's predictive theories say it is. According to Dr. Yon, "Your world is a hallucination." Our experience is partly based on the theories that the

² 5 Illusions That Reveal How Your Brain Warps Reality, Daniel Yon, BBC Science Focus Magazine, (August 10, 2025), (found at: <https://www.sciencefocus.com/the-human-body/5-illusions-reveal-brain-warps-reality>).

brain and mind have, to predict what reality is or what it will be. This is true especially when it is trying to “fill in the blank” from garbled information. Dr. Yon explains that when you hear audio that is manipulated so that it sounds garbled, you can’t gather much information at all. Then listen to the full audio in its unmanipulated form. Now, go back to the original, garbled audio. It actually sounds completely different. You can actually hear what is being said. Your brain, after hearing the unmanipulated audio now can predict the meaning of the message and give you that experience. The mind blowing part of this is that your actual experience changes with new predictions.

Maybe you think this is too freaky, A more mundane example is mirror therapy³ where a person who has lost a limb can look at strategically positioned mirrors that make it look like they have two arms or two legs instead of one. They can stretch or move their remaining limb to alleviate phantom pains. Fooling the brain in this case solves the phantom pain with no other intervention.

The easiest way to fool your brain to create a wanted outcome is to use your imagination. Give your mind repeated positive imagery. Specifically, use guided imagery as a tool to support the outcomes you want. Do you want to become stronger? One study found that simply imagining doing weight machine exercises increased strength by 24%.⁴ Of course, your best bet is to imagine the exercise 3-5 times per week for 15 minutes for 4-8 weeks and also do the exercise in the physical world. Want to lose weight? Another study found that using Functional Imagery Training lead to five times the weight loss than talk therapy.⁵

For many of us, we do use imagery to flood our minds with images and stories of unwanted outcomes. We use this powerful mental tool to fool ourselves in ways that are disempowering. Now that you know that we are all fooling ourselves a rather large amount of the time, can you fool yourself into greater happiness, health and goodness?

³ Fooling the Brain, Fooling the Pain: The Role of Mirror Therapy and Modern Uses in Virtual Reality, Charles Faure, Annabelle Limballe, Hugo A. Kerhervé, *Frontiers for Young Minds* (July 3, 2019) (found at: <https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2019.00091>).

⁴ Mind Over Matter: Mental Training Increases Physical Strength, Erin M. Shackell, Lionel G Standing, *North American Journal of Psychology* 9(1) (March 2007).

⁵ Lose 5 Times More Weight By Training Your Mind, Maria Cohut, Ph.D., *Medical News Today*, (September 26, 2018) (found at: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323184>).