

An Interview With Valerie DeLaune, L.Ac.

What are trigger points?

"Trigger points" are areas of cells in the muscle where blood flow has been reduced, and cellular metabolic wastes aren't being exchanged for oxygen and nutrients. If enough trigger points are located together, these form the "knots" that you can feel when they are being pressed.

How does treating trigger points successfully treat pain?

Very often trigger points aren't located in the area where you're actually feeling symptoms, so it doesn't necessarily help to work only in the area you feel pain. *This is called "referred pain", and it is the most important thing to know about trigger points.* My books tell you *which* muscles to check for trigger points based on where you feel your pain.

Give an example of treating trigger points remote to the area of pain.

A common area of pain is the temple area, including for many headaches. The trapezius muscle, in the mid-back area, is most likely to cause pain here. Other possible muscles would be in the front or back of the neck. The temporalis muscle is the *only* muscle that can cause temple pain that is in the same area as the temple. Trigger point therapy is knowing which muscles to check that might be causing pain in a particular area.

Do trigger points cause symptoms other than pain?

Yes. A good example would be the sternocleidomastoid on the front of the neck, which can be involved in headaches. It can also cause dizziness, blurred vision, nausea, sinus congestion, ear problems, a cough, eyelid twitching, and several other non-pain symptoms. My books list all the common symptoms, to help you figure out which muscles are involved.

What causes trigger points?

I devoted about 1/3 of both of my books to addressing the causes of trigger points and what keeps them activated even after treatment, and how to figure out and eliminate those perpetuating factors. A common trigger for headache-related trigger points are stresses to the muscles, for example, poor posture at work or a mattress that needs to be replaced. Trigger points can also be caused by injuries, overuse, nutritional problems, endocrine system imbalances such as hypothyroidism and, some diseases and infections. Stress can be a big player. For some people, just changing their diet or drinking more water can really help relieve headache pain. If your practitioner isn't

helping you figure out your perpetuating factors and how to address them, your pain and other symptoms will keep coming back, and they are missing a big piece to treating trigger points.

Won't trigger points go away on their own?

A lot of people wait to get treatment when they get injured, thinking it will go away. If your pain hasn't gone away within a week or two, you need to do something. It may go away for awhile, but permanent damage to the muscle tissue has likely already taken place, and the pain will come back. The longer you wait, the more muscles become involved, and treatment becomes more complex and takes longer. Eventually the central nervous system gets involved, and pain becomes chronic.

What's the difference between headaches and migraines?

Migraines are actually a type of headache, but because most people distinguish them as two different things, I do the same thing to avoid confusion. There are several types of headaches, including tension headaches, migraines, and cluster headaches. Migraines are usually more severe, and are often accompanied by other symptoms such as nausea, dizziness, and auras. If you go to my website triggerpointrelief.com, I have a table that breaks headaches into type by symptom, and list the things that commonly trigger each type of headache.

How do trigger points cause headaches and migraines?

Trigger points can be a huge contributor to causing headaches. On my website, triggerpointrelief.com, I have a chart that tells you how high the likelihood is that trigger points are a factor in causing your headaches depending on the type of headache, and also which perpetuating factors are most likely to be keeping your trigger points activated.

How long does it take to get relief?

That depends on how long the problem has gone on, and how many perpetuating factors are involved. Once you start self-care or treatment with a practitioner, you will likely start to get at least some relief immediately. If you have trigger points in several muscles and a lot of perpetuating factors that need to be identified and addressed, you will keep making progress over time, probably with some set-backs. Those set-backs help you identify perpetuating factors you hadn't figured out yet.

How long have you been treating trigger points?

I got my Swedish massage training in 1989, and my first trigger point training in 1990. After that, I used Doctors Travel and Simons texts to learn a great deal more about trigger points. All of my years of clinical experience are also included in my books.

How long have you lived in Alaska, and what's it like?

I've been here since 1982. It's an incredibly beautiful place, but it's definitely not for everyone. You have to be willing to move at a slower pace, and have patience for weather delays. You can't get everything you want right when you want it. You have to respect the wilderness, and if you go out on a trail, in a boat, or in a bush plane, you have to be fully prepared to survive for several days, if necessary. I frequently have bears on my front porch. Before I moved into the place I live now, a bear had managed to get in, and got trapped inside while the owners were away. It destroyed the inside of the house before it finally managed to break a window and escape (don't tell my Mom!). Moose can be even more dangerous than bears, and you have to be careful even walking around some Alaska cities.

What are the most exciting things that have happened to you there?

Last October I was hiking and had a wolf run up to within 15 feet of me and stand there for 5 minutes, and then it followed me for over an hour. I recognized it as a lone wolf whose mate was killed a few years ago and has unfortunately gotten very used to human-dog interactions, and I knew it just wanted to play with my dogs because it's so lonely. I also know that wolves don't attack humans, so I wasn't scared, and didn't feel remotely threatened. But I have to admit it was the thrill of a lifetime, to see a wild wolf that close. I didn't let my dogs play with it since I know that only adds to the problem, but my heart did break for the wolf. They very much need other wolves for companionship and to hunt for food as a pack.

What are your favorite things to do in Alaska?

I'm a big hiker and downhill skier. I also like to kayak, snowshoe, fish, and ice skate. Just about anything outdoors. Watching the northern lights from a hot tub on a snowy night is really special, or ice skating at night on a frozen lake in front of a glacier with northern lights filling the sky. We have a lot of recreation cabins around here, so I like to go on trips with friends. Depending on the time of year, we might kayak, or ski or snowshoe on days trips from the cabins.

How do people find you?

Triggerpointrelief.com.