

Therapeutic Insight: The Myofascial Release Perspective—Depression

by John Barnes, P.T., L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B



Myofascial release has many well-known benefits, including reducing pain, headaches and symptoms associated with fibromyalgia. However, a secondary benefit for many has been lifting depression, decreasing inner anxiety and restoring a general calmness and joy in their life.

One possible explanation that seems to be related to depression is compression of the occipital-condyles. This type of compression can produce excessive pressure on the brain from fascial restrictions that can cause cervical pain or headaches. Unresolved emotional trauma can also mimic an endogenous depression.

The brain is a fascial sponge with specialized structures embedded within it. The dura is the fascia that covers the brain and central nervous system. Fascial restrictions can cause enormous pressure, impeding the proper oxygenation of the cells, nutrition, obstructing the flow of neurotransmitters and the release of toxins within the brain and cranial cavity. This can create physiological chaos and seems to point to a structural reason for some people's depression, anxiety, pain and/or headaches.

I believe this pressure is interpreted by the brain as a life-threatening event and the person is thrown into a fight-or-flight response. In other words, it is as if the danger is there and the alarms are ringing. The body responds accordingly and over time,

becomes stuck in a state of mental/emotional hypervigilance that results in exhaustion and depression. Myofascial release can relieve that pressure and allow the body to return to equilibrium and homeostasis.

Symptoms in the upper cervical area from cervical trauma or even torsions as far away as the pelvis can create restrictions in the occipital-condyle area. This would contribute to the scenario we talked about: dural pressure on the brain that can mimic endogenous depression. So many times when people have had myofascial occipital-condyle releases and/or cranial work the depression lifts, anxiety lessens and the person returns to a more healthy state of peace and tranquility.

Women have had to suffer for weeks, months and sometimes even years with postpartum depression. Unfortunately, more than 90 percent of women have torsions of the pelvis and severe fascial restrictions that have been unrecognized. So as she is delivering her baby, that pressure now exceeds what she should be expected to endure. The constant pushing compresses the occipital-condyle area again and again, creating what appears to be an endogenous depression, called postpartum depression due to the situation.

Myofascial release throughout the whole body, particularly balancing the pelvis, opening the spine, releasing the occipital-condyle area and myofascial techniques for the cranial area, can be extremely calming and therapeutic.

You might be interested in reading this new, evidence-based article on pain, anxiety and depression entitled, "Benefits of Massage-Myofascial Release Therapy on Pain, Anxiety, Quality of Sleep, Depression, and Quality of Life in Patients with Fibromyalgia," by Adelaida María Castro-Sánchez, et al. You can find the full article on PubMed in the section on Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine: eCAM by clicking [here](#).

Sincerely,

John



John F. Barnes, P.T., L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B., is an international lecturer, author and acknowledged expert in the area of myofascial release. He has instructed more than 50,000 therapists worldwide in his Myofascial Release Approach, and he is the author of Myofascial Release: the Search for Excellence (Rehabilitation Services Inc., 1990) and Healing Ancient Wounds: the Renegade's Wisdom (Myofascial Release Treatment Centers & Seminars, 2000). He is on the counsel of advisors of the American Back Society, as well as on MASSAGE Magazine's Editorial Advisory Board and is a member of the American

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For more information about myofascial release, view two separate excerpts from the *Fireside Chat with John F. Barnes, P.T.* DVD on YouTube:

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