

Myofascial Pain Syndrome Case Study by Meg Syfan

The following case study is with my client who has been diagnosed with Myofascial Pain Syndrome. My hope is that this information will give insight and understanding to this condition and how Aquatic Integration can be helpful in relieving the pain associated with it.

Myofascial Pain Syndrome is a chronic condition that affects the fascia (connective tissue that covers the muscles). It may involve either a single muscle or a muscle group. In some cases, the area where a person experiences the pain may not be where the myofascial pain generator is located. Experts believe that the actual site of the injury or the strain prompts the development of a trigger point that, in turn, causes pain in other areas. This situation is known as referred pain.

Myofascial pain may develop from a muscle injury or from excessive strain on a particular muscle or muscle group, ligament or tendon. Other causes include injury to muscle fibers, repetitive motions, or lack of activity (such as having a broken arm in a sling).

Myofascial pain symptoms usually involve muscle pain with specific "trigger" or "tender" points. The pain can be made worse with activity or stress. In addition to the local or regional pain associated with Myofascial Pain Syndrome, people with the disorder also can suffer from depression and fatigue and behavioral disturbances. (WebMD)

1/20/15 – phone conversation and first session (1 hour on phone, 1 hour in pool)

My client is 58 years old, married with three adult children. She has been an extreme athlete while holding down a stressful job as the director of a nursery school. She admitted that she does everything to the extreme and did not have a sense of where her limits were. A year ago, suddenly she was in pain throughout her whole body. She went to the Mayo clinic and was diagnosed with Myofascial Pain Syndrome. She is on pain medication but is very limited in what she is able to do comfortably. The trigger points are throughout her body (neck, shoulders and abdomen are most severe) and she gets some relief with massage. She was told several times that water therapy would be very helpful. She was seeing a PT on a regular basis and was then referred to me.

I first spoke with her on the phone and she shared her symptoms with me. She was very interested in AI but was not familiar with it. When she came to the pool we talked about how she was feeling at the moment. She was scared partly because she did not know what to expect but also not sure how her body was going to react. She also expressed concern about not being able to relax. She felt most of her soreness in her neck and shoulder on her right side.

I could feel the tension in her body when I got her floating but in a short time I felt her relaxing some. Her neck was tight but her arms moved away from her body and her legs appeared relaxed over the noodle. I moved very slowly working on her upper body first with stretching and massaging neck, arms, upper traps, and shoulders. Moving into the torso I chose some serpentine movements and her body responded well. With one leg off

the noodle I stretched abductors and adductors and she felt stiff in that area but she was comfortable with this movement. Her movement was constricted with cervical traction as well but she was still comfortable. I continued asking about her comfort level with different movements and she was pain free. This was the first time in a year she had not had any pain. We are planning sessions two days a week.

I spoke with her the next day and she felt great coming out of the pool until she got in her car. She began to feel pain and she realized that she was holding tension in her arms. She tried to remember what it felt like in the pool and her arms began to relax some. She has been researching on her own about pain as it relates to the mind/body connection and is applying techniques that she is finding helpful in managing her pain. She is very excited to continue working in the pool.

1/27/15 (1 hour)

Due to scheduling conflicts we are changing our sessions to once a week. Greeted my client and inquired about how her body was feeling and she realized that she had done too much the day before. She was in severe pain yesterday and it was lingering into today. Too much was doing the dishes, doing the laundry, and going to the store. She feels tension before the pain starts and I encouraged her to stop what she is doing when the tension begins, rest for a bit, and then continue the activity to see if she can avoid getting to the pain stage. She was open to the suggestion.

She expressed that she was relieved of her pain once she was in the water except from the neck up. I could feel the tension in her neck when I got her floating and I worked extensively on neck massage, stretches, and gentle movements. I moved on through her body working on the upper torso. Her breath seemed shallow and her eyes were open the entire session. Her body moved well in the water with serpentine movements and her arms were relaxed. Cervical traction was softer. Her lower body is more restricted. Moving limbs from the mid line is limited but it is not painful. Left side more range of motion than right. She expressed that if she were to move that way on land it would cause pain.

Her neck loosened up some by the end of the session but upon landing on the wall it tensed up again, although she was not in pain. This session was different for her in that she was more aware of the restrictions in her movements. In the last session she was not as aware because she was more focused on the fact that she was not in pain. She also stated that she felt a sense of her body in space and is more aware of how her spine is moving when she is in the water. She hasn't been able to do that on land.

3/17 (1 hour)

After a long period of time away from the pool, my client decided to have a session and continue once a week. We started with walking across the pool a few times with deliberate movement with her arms and legs and she was comfortable doing that, but stated that it is not comfortable on land. She is convinced that she doesn't know how to relax her body but during the session her arms and legs moved with ease in the different

positions. Angel wings was especially apparent as her arms moved from by her side up to her head and back down again. She mentioned that her memory has been lacking and that during the session she was having memories of her mother who died when she (my client) was 29 years old and realized that she had memories of her in all the sessions we have had. Those memories have not been clear to her on land.

4/4 (1.5 hours)

Feedback from last session was that she was free of pain for a couple days. She expressed that the trigger points in her ribcage and stomach constrict her breathing. We took some time to focus on diaphragmatic breathing, inhaling through her nose and exhaling fully out her mouth, and she could feel the difference but this did not come easy to her. She then walked back and forth across the pool several times. I noticed that her stride was same leg and arm on each side moving together. She mentioned that her daughter noticed that she walks that way on land. I asked her to try using her opposite arm with opposite leg. She was able to do it but had to really think about it.

She has difficulty feeling the difference between tightness and relaxation in her muscles. I had her make a tight fist and then let go to see if she could feel the difference and she got a sense of it. She worked on this at home and was able to feel it more distinctly.

Throughout the session I used similar moves from last session, and her body moved well in the water. She wanted to end the session by going under water a few times. She exhaled and sat on the bottom and she really enjoyed the sensation. We've been discussing underwater work as a possibility in future sessions.

4/9 (1.5 hours)

Started again with walking across the pool focusing on opposite arm opposite leg. It was easier for her this time. She was comfortable for the most part during the week after the last session. She works occasionally at the school and her pain returned after working with a group of 2 year olds. She realized that she was not aware of how she was moving when lifting the kids and her overall movement around the room. Otherwise she has noticed that when she is aware of her breathing and how she is moving she is more comfortable.enjamin22

She has expressed in most of the sessions that she doesn't really feel her body moving through the water. I explained to her that during this session there would be times when her body would be moving dynamically through the water and other times where I will be holding a more static position. I invited her to bring about an awareness to feel when her body is still and when her body is moving through the water. I also encouraged her to stay focused on her breath and she was able to do that more easily. She has been practicing breathing outside of the pool and it has been increased her awareness. At the end of the session she was surprised and excited that she was able to feel the difference between stillness and movement.

4/22 (1 hour)

It was very apparent watching my client walking into the pool area that she was uncomfortable. She was quiet and moving very stiffly but when she got in the pool her tension began to release. She had a hard week and was having a lot of pain in her abdomen. She has difficulty releasing the trigger points in that area and as a result she has bloating and pain which makes it difficult to breath fully. Some stressful family issues came up and she didn't realize that she was stressed from it. As she walked back and forth through the pool her pain was subsiding and by the time I got her floating she had relaxed quite a bit. We reviewed being focused on her breath and as she began to relax more I could hear and feel her breath more fully. Overall she felt relaxed during the session but her neck and shoulders were still holding some tension so I focused on loosening that area. I found that when I had her head in the cradle of my arm it was a lot more relaxed than when it was being supported with just my hand. I felt that she needed a more secure hold in the neck area in order for it to relax.

At the end of the session her energy had completely changed. She felt trigger points releasing on their own, she felt like she could breath fully, she felt hungry (she hasn't felt hunger since she has been having pain), and she could feel her whole body.

She also shared that during the session she could feel her family intruding in her space and she would not let them in. She told herself that this was her time and they would not be allowed to interfere. This was huge to hear from her. It is difficult for her to say no and be able to focus only on herself. I encouraged her to find time during each day to find that focus and allow that time for herself.

After processing through these sessions, I realized that every time my client has come to the pool she enters quietly with very little dialogue and looking like she is uncomfortable. By the end of every session her voice is stronger, she is animated, and amazed by how good she feels. Overall though she seems more and more comfortable with coming to the pool without concerns that her body might not react well, as she did when I first began sessions with her. Because of her enthusiasm with wanting to do everything right and to the best of her ability I believe it was important not to give her too much homework to do on her own at first. As our sessions progressed I felt she was able to take more in and incorporate more tools to use when she is out of the pool. Also, I was able to incorporate some different moves with her as I saw that her body was ready for them.

In conclusion my goal in this treatment is to keep encouraging my client to take what she learns in the pool and incorporate it into life on land. I have suggested as homework to practice breathing fully, being mindful of how she moves throughout the day, having more of an awareness when her body is telling her when she needs to stop, and to take time to focus just on herself. Also, I've encouraged her to have pool sessions as often as she can because of the immediate and lasting relief she gets from the sessions.

Her goal is to live more comfortably and be able to do more of the things she would like to do by using the tools she is learning to create that. I believe she is gaining a sense of empowerment by her experience in the water because she believes that it is possible to relieve her pain with her condition which she didn't think was possible. She is very

committed to taking what she has learned in the pool and is incorporating into her daily life.

I am so encouraged working with my client. I've not experienced sessions that have been so immediately transforming. To hear the feedback of how good she feels during the session is so validating that AI is extremely effective for this condition. I would highly recommend AI to other practitioners working with someone with this type of pain.

Meg Syfan

For the past five years I've enjoyed a private practice as a certified massage therapist. Through my training I was introduced to Aquatic Integration and resonated deeply with it the moment I received a session myself, and found it very relaxing and healing. I have recently become a certified AI practitioner and am looking forward to offering this experience to others.