



Winning the Battle in your Brain!

At Quinlisk Wellness and Performance, the emphasis of treatment is placed on the nervous system. More specifically, I am trying to achieve balance (homeostasis) between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, which will help to feel more calm, relaxed and pain free. I will clarify what this means a little bit later.

I believe most people would agree that we tend to live in a stressed state (especially these days!) that prevents a good night's sleep, leads us to poor nutritional choices (because we think it is easier) and unexplained pain and other physical symptoms like, anxiety, diarrhea, headaches, neck pain etc. This makes us frustrated, aggravated and tired or potentially sick and tired!

My approach to treating pain and other physical symptoms is not traditional or typical and yet it is painless and non-invasive. With this unique approach, I am attempting to change the body's reaction to stressors (which is tension) because prolonged tension ultimately leads to pain and a potential list of other physical problems. As you read on, I believe you will understand why chronic pain and other physical problems are such a major emotional and financial burden in and on our country! Also, many people live in a state of hopelessness, because no one can find out what is wrong with them!

Well, we at Quinlisk Wellness and Performance we know what's wrong!

Let me explain a little further. We have all experienced one or more traumatic events in our life. When we encounter a traumatic situation, our body will respond instinctively in an attempt to protect us from harm. Our body's reflexive response to a real or perceived traumatic situation or threat is the fight, flight or freeze response. Our body's reaction to this response is to create instant muscle tension as we assess the immediate situation. In many cases, all we need to do is think about a traumatic situation (even years earlier) and our body will instantly tense up as it remembers the incident like it is happening all over again.

The following are examples of traumatic events:

Partial List of Traumatic Events

- 1) Death of a loved one(s)
- 2) Divorce
- 3) Life threatening illness
- 4) Physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse
- 5) Assault or threat of assault
- 6) Bullying
- 7) Witnessing terror

- 8) Kidnapping
- 9) An embarrassing event
- 10) Poor business decisions
- 11) Being fired
- 12) Being laid off
- 13) Choking or being choked
- 14) Coming out (sexuality)
- 15) Wartime experiences
- 16) Sickness of a spouse/child/friend
- 17) 24/7 concern over a child's allergies (ie: peanuts) or sickness
- 18) Foreclosure
- 19) Bankruptcy
- 20) Involvement in a flood, tornado, earthquake, fire or hurricane
- 21) Child of an alcoholic
- 22) Hit by a car
- 23) Unresolved sports injuries
- 24) Defamation of character
- 25) Suicide of family member, friend
- 26) Failed surgery
- 27) Struck by lightning
- 28) Holocaust survivor
- 29) Child of holocaust survivor
- 30) Betrayal
- 31) Never being told you were loved
- 32) Abandonment
- 33) Alcoholism
- 34) Miscarriage
- 35) Substance abuse
- 36) Car jacking
- 37) Empty nest syndrome
- 38) Name calling
- 39) Single parenthood
- 40) Carbon monoxide poisoning
- 41) Awareness during anesthesia
- 42) Neglect
- 43) Near drowning experience
- 44) Adoption
- 45) Motor vehicle accident

If we use a motor vehicle accident as an example of a traumatic event, we can begin to see what instantly happens to the body at a reflex level in our brain. Imagine your self driving along, listening to the radio or talking on your cell phone when all of a sudden someone pulls out in front of you. I think we would all agree that the following would happen simultaneously:

- tightly grip the steering wheel

- tense the shoulders and neck
- slam on the brake
- clench your teeth
- breathe in quickly with a hissing sound
- eyes wide open
- increased heart rate
- rapid breathing

All of this happens in a microsecond with no conscious thought. It is a reflex reaction! More specifically, it is called the startle reflex, which we have all experienced at some level during our lives. This reflex is hard-wired into our brain in utero. No one had to teach you to react like this. We have all seen a newborn that startles in response to a loud noise, indicating this is an instinctive response, not a learned response. Many of us have a VERY sensitive startle reflex that may be due to previous trauma in our lives. If this describes you, you probably hate to be scared, even though others think it is funny!

When we experience significant muscular tension as a result of trauma **especially when we perceive the situation to be life threatening**, the muscle tension pattern gets programmed into our brain, which creates a procedural memory (1) pattern that impacts our physical body and does not go away easily. It will lessen at times, but can be easily triggered by one or more of your senses. In a non-traumatic sense, procedural memory is the muscle memory of how to ride a bike or ski, even though you may not have done it in years. In a traumatic sense, procedural memory creates muscle tension that gets locked in our brain and then our body and we develop what are called trigger points. These are points that are exquisitely tender to touch and they get “triggered” by stimulation of any one or a combination of our senses. If you have chronic pain or fibromyalgia, you know exactly what I mean by a trigger point.

We’ve all had times when we hear an old song or a smell a certain scent and our minds can instantly rewind to the memory of a particular person and/or place and/or event, whether good or bad. If we immerse ourselves into the memory, we may even feel certain feelings. It is possible to actually “feel” like we are living the moment again. If the memories are bad, we may try to prevent ourselves from remembering too much (so we stuff it away) because of how it will make us feel. We try to distract ourselves with eating, smoking, exercise, etc. Think about September 11th for a moment. When we see a picture of one of those planes crashing into the tower (that is called a flashbulb memory), we can instantly “feel” a certain sensation in our body or smell coffee brewing or feel the warmth of the sun. Now imagine that you have an intense personal relationship to 9/11, say someone you know died as a result of that terrorist attack. Now the emotional tagging of that event is much greater and creates more of a somatic (body) response every time you hear or read (see) something associated with that point in time.

With this example, we can now think about our own traumatic events and see how our body reacts when we think about those times in our lives. Are we protecting ourselves from those memories? Can we actually protect ourselves from those memories or do the emotions eventually emerge in a different way (ie: pain, anxiety, insomnia)? No matter

how logical you try to be about a particular situation (“just get over it or just relax!”) the emotions will always prevail. **Emotion trumps logic every time!**

There is a basic scientific principle called the Conservation of Mass. Essentially it means, “what goes in must come out.” I am going to apply this concept to basic bodily functions. What I eat, must come out...what I drink, must come out...but stress stays in my body or trickles out at best.

Unfortunately, we are like a sponge for stress and we do not know how to wring ourselves out! We try to “get rid of it” whether we realize it or not, but mostly to no avail. Sometimes we create our own stress (poor decision making) and sometimes someone perpetrates against us or both. Regardless of the origin, it is tough to get it all out and feel relaxed.

Use the food example again, but this time imagine there is an obstruction. The food is stuck in my trachea and I cannot breathe. My body goes into immediate distress. All my body’s alarms are sounding off!! Nothing else is important at that moment, except survival. What went into my body must immediately come out.

Now, let’s go back to a stressful event in our life. The tension, as a result of a reflex reaction to a traumatic situation or memory, comes into our body. How do we get it out? We try many ways to fulfill the conservation of mass. Here are some examples, some are good and some not so good:

- 1) exercising or exercising excessively
- 2) smoking
- 3) drinking alcohol and diet soft drinks
- 4) illicit drug use
- 5) chewing gum
- 6) going for a walk
- 7) soaking in a hot tub or hot bath
- 8) having sex or having sex excessively
- 9) kicking the dog
- 10) yelling at your spouse or kids
- 11) grinding your teeth
- 12) laughing with friends
- 13) deep breathing
- 14) watching a comedy show
- 15) overeating or undereating
- 16) working too much

Most of us try to suppress this stress and act like we have it all together. We put up a wall, men especially or the Super Mom! As you may realize, this suppression requires a significant amount of energy and ultimately something has got to give. We get tired, depressed, agitated and anxious which can lead to more tension and pain. We are living in a viscous cycle!

Try to imagine you start every day with an empty balloon. As stress accumulates throughout the day, you begin to fill the balloon with air. The more stressful the situation, the more air goes into the balloon. What goes in, must come out or the balloon will eventually POP! We need to learn how to discharge this pressure, because when the balloon pops it is rarely good.

Our egos may stand in the way and will not permit us to “discharge” the stress that ultimately can rid the body of discomfort and dysfunction. What we think is protecting us (the wall) is actually preventing healing from taking place and we do not know how to dismantle the wall.

I want you to imagine a seesaw. One end of the seesaw represents the part of your nervous system that makes you tense and it is called the sympathetic nervous system. You may know it as “fight or flight.” The other end of the seesaw represents the part of your nervous system that relaxes you, called the parasympathetic nervous system. You may have heard it called “rest and digest.”

If one end of the seesaw is the stress in your life and the other end is the relaxation, which one is winning in your life?? Is your seesaw balanced? I would venture to say that most would say the stress side is EASILY winning...maybe ALWAYS winning. It seems as though our society has resigned itself to the fact that this is the way life is supposed to be. The technical term for creating balance in your life like the see saw is called homeostasis. The goal at Quinlisk Wellness and Performance is to create this state of homeostasis in your mind and body and **teach you how** to maintain this state of peace and calm.

Most of us are clueless about how to access the relaxation side of our nervous system or we may find that we always have to continually try and access the relaxation side (like with excessive exercising) in order to temporarily feel normal. Sometimes we just can't exercise enough. We may feel like we are chasing our stress but we can never catch it. Stress always seems to win. Most of us find it difficult to relax at all and we do not know what being relaxed would feel like. We don't have the time, the desire, energy or money so we figuratively (and maybe literally) kick the dog in an attempt to “discharge” some of this negative energy that is building up inside.

So how do we get this all balanced and discharge all of this negative energy in a healthy way?

At Quinlisk Wellness and Performance, we use treatments that eliminate this tension and we teach you how to create this balance (homeostasis) in your nervous system. Our bodies have been classically conditioned (have you heard of the Pavlovian response?) to instantly react (tension) to certain triggers.

Potential triggers are:

- a certain smell

- the sight of a person
- the sound of a person's name
- the touch of someone you dislike

There are many other triggers! You may or may not know what triggers you.

The treatment program at Quinlisk Wellness and Performance will classically re-condition your body so that even though the memory still exists, it does not trigger a cascade of events that eventually leads to stress, discomfort and dysfunction. Think about it as re-booting your hard drive! But you cannot evolve from your current state of mind and body, unless you are involved. We like to call it Evolverment, a term coined by my colleague Scott Musgrave, MSPT. You cannot learn to ski by just watching. You must get involved and the more you become involved in the process, the more you will improve.

Let's discuss the term "classical conditioning." You may recall Ivan Pavlov's experiments in 1905 with the ringing of a bell and the conditioned reflex of a dog salivating. This classical conditioning is occurring within all of us at a reflex level, subsequently causing tension and pain to emerge and never go away. What's missing in humans vs. animals is our ability to **discharge** that stored negative energy (stress) that potentially leads to so much dysfunction in our bodies and in some cases even death.

According to Robert Scaer, M.D., a Colorado local and world-renown Traumatologist, the discharge is critical for the total healing of the individual (1). Animals discharge (shake or tremble) in the wild after a traumatic event and in many cases walk away unscathed (2). According to Dr. Peter Levine, the animal's ultimate survival depends upon this discharge. There is no ego involvement with animals and no repression of the discharge.

The discharge for a human may involve trembling or shaking, similar to a frightened animal or it may be the elimination of all the trigger points from the treatments that we use and tools we teach you. More than likely it is a combination of our ego and societal influences that prevent and suppress the discharge, for men and women alike. Sometimes, we pass this trait on to our children and perpetuate this unhealthy style of living.

My evaluation process to find the tension in your body is simple and only takes a couple minutes. I use my hands to assess your body for trigger points. The trigger point may make you jump and/or pull away when I touch it. Most of my patients are quite surprised that I find these points in areas that do not hurt. I then map out these trigger points and determine your individual pattern. The intent of treatment is to simply discharge these trigger points with a gentle and relaxing treatment called Reflex Relaxation™.

The patient I typically help has already seen a MD, PT, Chiropractor, Massage Therapist, Rolfer, Acupuncturist, etc. yet they still have some level of unexplained pain and other physical symptoms. It is not that these approaches are not helpful. They are all time tested and quite beneficial for thousands of people. I am talking about the person who has

not received any long term benefits from any combination of treatment. These patients may needlessly judge themselves or feel they are being judged, considering themselves a hopeless case.

My approach to treating pain is to get to the root of the problem, which I believe lies in the nervous systems continuous aberrant response to memory triggers (whether or not we are aware of the trigger) that cause certain emotions to always surface. This causes tension and subsequently chronic physical problems like pain. I am always happy to work with your current medical provider(s) and once we can make this dramatic shift in pain, I send you back to your medical provider and I will work with him or her as needed.

The initial appointment will last about 2 hours and subsequent appointments are generally 90 minutes. We will discuss memories and emotions and how this may be impacting your body and causing physical pain, however (and this is important!) I do not need to know any details of your traumatic experience(s). Please realize that your sense of safety is critical for success. With your permission, a trusted companion is **ALWAYS** welcome to attend your treatment session.

In between appointments, patients are given home exercises (not traditional exercises) to re-boot or classically re-condition their hard drive (brain). Each treatment builds on the previous treatment and the home exercises are **critical** for success. The exercises take only seconds, but must be repeated frequently during the course of the day. This will help to ensure the change you need to make in your body. A detailed explanation is provided during your session.

Remember, we are attempting to classically re-condition your brain, so it does not tense up when there is an emotional trigger from one or more of your senses. Once this has been accomplished and you are feeling better, I will typically follow up with a patient every 1-3 months or so for a re-boot of your hard drive to ensure homeostasis. Patients will need to continue with the exercises on a less frequent level, knowing that stress and trauma will continue to be a part of our daily lives. It is like going to the dentist. Even if you get a clean bill of oral health, you will still continue to brush and floss. In other words, you need to maintain and I will teach you how to do this!

I am not a psychotherapist and if a traumatic event has occurred in your life, I do not need to know the details of the event. I realize these issues can be extremely disturbing, shameful, embarrassing, etc. and discussing them in detail can be quite “painful.” I am interested to know if there has been trauma, however, so I can be sensitive to it during your treatment session. In some cases, there has not been a trauma or no memory of a trauma. Regardless, you will need to feel safe with me as your therapist in order for you to achieve maximal results. A psychotherapist or psychiatrist have advanced skills in dealing with the psychological side of your trauma. In many cases, I will recommend a psychotherapist if you do not have one.

Many people ask me how I define wellness. I do believe there are elements of eating well, moving well and living well that help to define this term. To me it is as simple as

feeling comfortable in your own skin! If you truly have this kind of “wellness” in your life you will inevitably perform well, regardless of your activity or livelihood.

Please feel free to email any questions you may have about this process. To set up an appointment, the fastest way to contact Ernie Quinlisk, PT is through email ernie@quinliskwp.com or call 720-289-8015.

Please check out the testimonials on my website. Thanks for considering my services to help you reach your optimum level of function and live the kind of life you deserve!

- 1 - The Body Bears the Burden. Dr. Robert Scaer
- 2 - Waking the Tiger, Dr. Peter Levine