

# Looking at Your PAIN from a Different Perspective

By Kevin Wade, LMT, CINT

Most of our mothers told us to sit up straight. Maybe the directive was to stand up and stop slouching. I know mine did. It turns out, as it often does, that your mother was right. Perhaps, the maternal admonitions fell on receptive ears and you developed good postural habits. Good for you – you’ve won half the battle against various pain syndromes many people struggle with daily. However, your ability to truly “stand up straight” may be hampered by factors that are beyond your ability to consciously control. What I am alluding to here are aspects that contribute to our individual postural patterns, structural asymmetries and muscular imbalance. These asymmetries and imbalances lead to neck, back, hip and knee pain, sciatica, disc herniation, migraine headache and TMJ pain, among other things. What follows are central principals of Integrative Neurosomatic Therapy and have been applied to overcome pain where many other therapies failed.

## Structure is the Foundation

In my clinical experience as an Integrative Neurosomatic Therapist, the most overlooked reason for recurring and chronic pain is structural asymmetries in the length of the legs, also known as Lower Limb Length Inequality (LLLI). In this situation, the lengths of the bones of one leg are longer than the other, creating a fundamental structural imbalance in posture. Length discrepancies as small as 5mm (1/4 inch) contribute to sig-

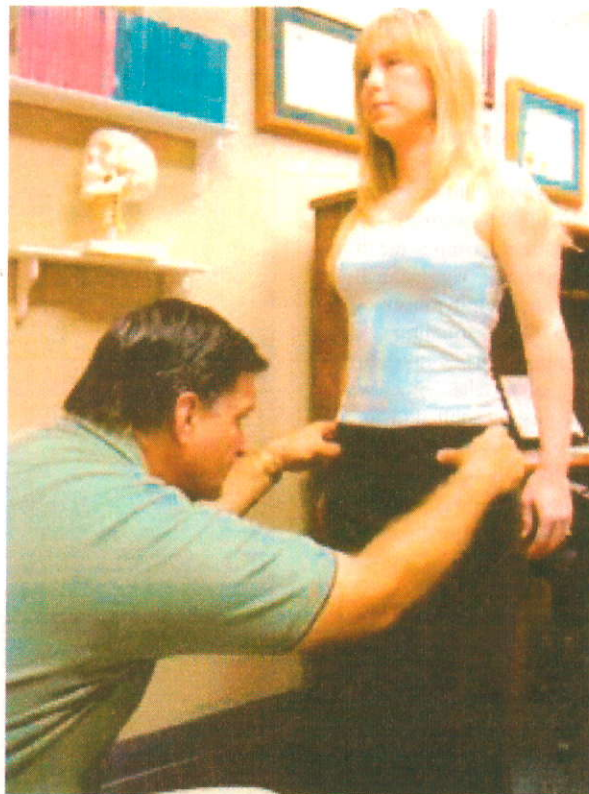
nificant musculoskeletal dysfunction (Travell and Simons, *Myofascial Pain and Dysfunction*, 1999). A 2005 study showed that about 60% of the population has a LLLI of 5mm or more (Knutson, *Chiropr Osteopat*, 2005 Jul 20).

When LLLI is present, the pelvis must tilt, twist or rotate in order for the body to remain functional. If the pelvis were to be level in this situation, one of the feet would not touch the ground – not a very functional position. These

compensations lead to shifts in the hips, knees, and ankles, up the spine, shoulders and even into the head. If there is one thing of which I am certain in evaluating the postural reasons for peoples’ pain, it is that when we have to adapt to postural distortions, we pay a price. The skeletal system has developed in such a way as to be very efficient at supporting our bodies when it is in alignment. However, when that alignment is distorted, our muscles have to do a tremendous amount of work to support the body in that position. Muscle spasm or strains are sure to follow along with decrease of blood flow and nutrient delivery, the development of trigger points, joint compression and inefficient, painful movement. Just like any building, if the foundation is not level, the rest of the structure will be unstable.

## Elevating to Alleviate

The key to addressing LLLI is proper evaluation and accurate measurement of length discrepancies followed by the use of a shoe lift and targeted bodywork. Proper evaluation must include measurement and comparison of multiple points along the length of the lower limb. LLLI cannot be detected by comparing the position of the legs at the heels only. This is a common error in evaluation leg length and may be related to earlier research that indicated that LLLI is present in only 1-2% of the population. In this case the assumption is that, what looks like a leg length difference is being caused by muscular contractions pulling one hip higher than the other, pulling the leg with it, giving the





appearance of a short leg. For some pain sufferers, this functional leg length difference is the case, calling for a different approach to treatment.

I'll discuss postural distortions that are purely muscular in a moment. It is vitally important, when adding a shoe lift to address a LLLI, that it's a full-foot lift, extending from heel to toe. Inserting a heel-only lift increases existing postural distortions or creates new ones. The elevation provided by a full-foot lift sets the stage for creating balance in the entire muscular system. This balancing of the muscular and skeletal systems provides relief from not only hip and back pain but migraine headache, sciatica and the other conditions mentioned above.

## Amazing Adaptable Muscles

When a person's posture becomes distorted, muscles are called into action. The force of gravity is no longer dispersed by the rigid structure of the skeleton, causing the muscles to do its job – often causing muscle to contract to such a degree that it feels like bone! The amazing thing is that our muscular system has a tremendous ability to accomplish these compensations and keep us functional.

Often, due to our job, recreational activities or household duties, we develop postural patterns that are the result of repetitive movements or remaining in a position a long time. We adopt distorted postures due to injury, illness, poor nutrition and mental/emotional stress. These are all examples of how postural distortions can come from a purely muscular source. Whether the postural imbalance comes from a structural asymmetry or from muscle imbalance alone, attention must be given to releasing contracted and strengthening overstretched muscles. Since we are dealing with muscular imbalances, treatment must be applied in an asymmetrical way. Overly contracted muscles need three to four times more work than their overstretched counterparts, even though there may be more awareness of pain in the later. By focusing the appropriate amount of muscle release in the right places, balance is much more likely to be achieved. When balance is achieved pain patterns disappear.

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