

# Independent Pain Management

How new self-treatments are bringing hope to sufferers of chronic back pain

By Dr. Jonathan Reynolds, PT, PhD



The Institute of Medicine recently reported that chronic back pain costs an estimated \$636 billion and affects more than 100 million Americans. They outlined the various steps needed to curb this national challenge, including using public health communication strategies to educate sufferers on how to manage their own pain, and advising that healthcare providers tailor care to each individual's experience.<sup>1</sup>

*Dr. Reynolds is the co-owner and founder of Reynolds Rehabilitation Enterprises, out-patient orthopaedic, sports, music and dance medicine practices in Minneapolis and Eagan, MN. He has worked as a physical therapist since 1988 using Maitland, Cyriax, McKenzie and Travell manual therapy techniques, among others and is the inventor of the Tola™ Neuromuscular Release System.*

## A Silent Source

Management of pain, particularly chronic pain, presents frustrating dilemmas to physical therapists who don't feel comfortable with the treatment techniques needed to effectively address the condition, or find that patients regress to pre-treatment pain and dysfunction levels at return visits. Equally frustrating is the fact that stretching muscle(s) with active myofascial trigger points (MTP) is futile and sometimes makes pain worse.

MTPs, often the source of chronic pain are undetectable on X-rays, MRI, CT scan and EMG, and serum and blood count results are often normal.

Pain referred from MTPs does not necessarily follow dermatomal or myotomal patterns and may give rise to suspicion of symptom magnification by the ill-informed practitioner, who may be unwilling or unable to identify and/or manage. The Use of self-treat tools such as balls, rollers, canes and boards, to alleviate MTP-generated pain is widespread. Prices range from a \$1 tennis ball to upwards of \$275 for more elaborate equipment. Balls are the most commonly used tools. However, their flat contour doesn't allow for pressure application with sufficient acuity. They tend to move when lain upon or leaned against, and deeper penetration requires a larger ball, which has an even flatter contour and less acuity of penetration.

Some trigger point products require agility and strength to reach and apply pressure to some MTPs and can present a neurologically confusing stimulus if used on the upper body, since relaxation is desired in the same muscles that are being used to exert force. They are cumbersome to transport and cannot be used inconspicuously.

## A 'Hands-Free' Solution

The Tola™ System has been developed with these shortcomings in mind. The user is able to select from three different probe sizes, and heights and angles can be adjusted with various accessories (Tola™ Wedge and Tola™ Rocker) to lie on, lean against, or use as a handheld tool.

Tola™ Point geometry facilitates access of muscles without impinging on bony structures, and while relaxing the area being addressed. Subtle movements of arms or legs away from the site being addressed helps to alter the pressure being applied. The device is easily transported and can be used in the office, at home, or at the gym.



## Effective Pain Relief

Marked improvements have been documented after Tola™ System use in patients with chronic back pain, enabling quicker transition to strengthening, stretching, and aerobic activity – which is associated with release of various hormones essential to repair of damaged muscles. One specific patient demonstrated a 27% increase in lumbar flexion and a 533% increase in extension, as measured using dual inclinometry, and he registered 97% to 247%

increases in pressure pain threshold at gluteus medius and L4 paraspinal muscles after adding use of the Tola™ System prior to his stretching regimen at home. Another chronic pain sufferer of 20 years - following 9 ankle surgeries - cancelled below knee amputation surgery when MTPs were discovered in the lower limb that, when released, resulted in near complete pain relief. The system may be used for chronic and acute pain, as well as on muscle spindles

or Golgi tendon organs to release tight muscle prior to stretching. This is particularly useful in hypermobile individuals with isolated muscle tightness.

Use of the Tola™ System will assist both the therapist and patient in managing and treating chronic pain, thereby saving on unnecessary care and moving closer to satisfying the goals set forth by The Institute of Medicine.



The Tola™ 750 Point is shown being used to apply pressure to the ilio-tibial band (ITB). This technique can be used to reduce tension in the ITB and /or gluteal muscles.



The user places the Tola™ Point against the back of a chair and rests the area needing pressure against the point for a completely hands-free experience.



Or use your favorite Tola™ Point (with Rocker base) as a hand-held tool for a more targeted neuromuscular release.

*"The Tola™ is a simple but ingeniously designed self-help tool. With variable angles and surface areas delivered in a lightweight and compact package, the Tola™ is perfect for the traveler to get those kinks out after a flight or a bad hotel night. For the discerning client of bodywork or physical training, the Tola™ can be used to target trigger points, 'stuck' areas, or myofascial pain. The handbook concentrates on static pressure; for myself I get the best results by moving my body very slowly over the stationary tool to energize, hydrate, and re-awaken the tissues." – Thomas Myers, author of Anatomy Trains (Elsevier 2009) and Fascial Release for Structural Balance (2010)*

### TOLA™ SYSTEM NEUROMUSCULAR RELEASE

The Tola™ System uniquely enables users to apply deep, precise pressure to hard-to-reach soft tissues. It features 3 carefully designed "points" that can be used seated, standing or lying down to target trigger points for pain relief or facilitate neuromuscular release prior to stretching.

Includes the full-color 50 page instruction manual  
3 Tola™ Points, 2 Wedge bases and 1 Rocker base

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