

# Healthy Living for Dancers - May/June 2010

By Dr. Veronica Collings

In the last issue, I mentioned that I intended to discuss the adrenal glands, or stress glands, as a natural follow up to what we looked at with the thyroid.

Adrenal fatigue, that bone deep exhaustion, often follows a low thyroid condition. As the stress glands try to pick up the slack caused by an underfed and underactive thyroid, they themselves get depleted. Depleted is a good description of the overall condition and, of course, not a very good condition in which to be on the dance floor or anywhere else. I hope I piqued your interest with the adrenals – I will pick up here in the next issue. I must change gears because a more pressing condition is demanding this column by popular demand.

Three times since the last issue, dancers have asked me about a complaint that was hindering their performances on the dance floor. Right-sided hip, buttock and leg pain worsened with activity.

Normally, this symptom pattern could have a variety of causes, but, if you are a dancer, you are most likely suffering from “trigger points” in the gluteus medius and the surrounding region of your hip.

What is a trigger point and why in the right hip? According to doctors Janet Travell and David Simons in their widely acclaimed medical textbook, *Myofascial Pain and Dysfunction: The Trigger Point Manual*, trigger points are tiny contraction knots that develop in a muscle when it is injured or **overworked**. Overworked is the key for us as dancers because we repeatedly perform the same action of externally rotating our right leg every time we execute a turn, a spin or go into promenade, etc. Going to the right is our most common direction, ergo, the “natural turn,” and the right gluteus medius muscle is the muscle that externally rotates one’s leg and performs that action.

These gluteus knots that then form from the repetitive overwork cause referred pain, which can be quite a distance from its origin, such as into the low back, hip



Veronica Collings, center, with Karina Smirnoff and Jonathan Roberts of Dancing With the Stars.

and down the leg. The pain is felt most often as an oppressive deep ache, although movement can sharpen the pain – it can be constant or intermittent even at rest. Myofascial trigger point pain can be as intense and intolerable as pain from any other cause, including injuries or surgery.

Some other common examples of referred trigger point pain are headaches, sinus pain, and the kind of pain in the neck that won’t let you turn your head. Jaw pain, ear ache and even sore throat can be expressions of referred pain. Back to our original complaint.

The good news is that, once a trigger point is located, it can be easily treated and corrected. In fact, for a couple of my fellow dancers, some first aid right on the dance floor enabled them to continue enjoying their dance evening with some temporary relief.

Most trigger points can be permanently resolved with as little as six to ten applications of trigger point therapy. This consists primarily of digital pressure, which breaks up the knot and

brings oxygenated blood back to the contracted muscle. This allows it to return back to its normal juxtaposition and pain free function. This is a non-invasive procedure performed to the patient’s tolerance that feels much like massage, but is more focused and localized. I’ve been a certified trigger point therapist for nearly 20 years and, in that time, have worked with literally thousands of trigger point patients with astounding results. Two other major actions needed to recover from trigger points: (1) Make sure that you are fully hydrated; drinking 32 ounces of water for every 50 pounds that you weigh is essential to reduce the viscosity of your blood so that oxygen can be delivered to the injured area to remove the chemicals that build up in the trigger points. (2) Stretch often and consistently.

So, if these pain patterns are haunting you, please don’t hesitate to call my office, search for a qualified and experienced practitioner or even give a hand at trying to work on some of these trigger points yourself. *The Trigger Point Therapy Workbook* by Clair Davies has made treating trigger points accessible for the layman. Some pain patterns are amenable to self-treatment, while others are not, but, whether you are a do-it-yourselfer or prefer the expertise of a professional, please consider this very simple and elegant solution to an otherwise dance squelching problem. Until next issue, see you on the dance floor.

*About the Author: Dr. Collings is a summa cum laude graduate of Pennsylvania College of Chiropractic. As a holistic health care provider, she utilizes only natural remedies. Her offices are located in the Plymouth Plaza Building at 580 W. Germantown Pike, Suite 111, Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462, in front of the Plymouth Meeting Mall. She can be reached at 610-828-9634 or [vcollings@aol.com](mailto:vcollings@aol.com).*

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