

Body and Soul

Keeping Fit JACK WILLIAMS

Pain relief as close as your fingertips

With nothing more invasive than his fingertips and a miniature rubber hammer, John Iams embarks on a daily pain-relief mission. His strategy: literally tapping into the body's innate ability to heal itself.

In much the same way physicians test reflexes to see if the nerves are carrying messages from the brain to the body, Iams is trying to alleviate pain by relaxing contracted muscles. The key is not so much in the touch as understanding the anatomy and its complex circuitry well enough to pinpoint the source of pain.

But even Iams, a physical therapist for more than 30 years, concedes that "reflexes are hooked together in a way that we still don't fully understand."

Often, patients have found, the reflex response he elicits in muscles and tendons can restore normal blood flow and hasten healing.

Iams, who operates SuperSpine Inc. in Poway, has seen enough positive responses that he plans to share his methods early next year in Tampa at a meeting of the American Physical Therapy Association. He's also completing the manuscript for a book.

For the past few years, he's applied his gentle Pain Reflex Release Technique, PRRT for short, to a range of musculoskeletal problems — everything from sports injuries to the trauma of auto accidents.

"A patient usually will get better in two to three

sessions," he said. "If by the third session, there's no change, this particular method is not likely to be the answer for them."

Typically, he'll probe such areas as the base of the skull, the temple, the upper back, lower ribs, tailbone and sacroiliac.

Not until he exposed his techniques to health professionals who validated his methods did he feel he had the credibility to teach others.

Daniel Salomon, a medical doctor and researcher at The Scripps Research Institute, became a believer after seeing Iams heal his soccer-playing son's acute groin injury.

"Traditional medicine had a shot at it for two months," Salomon said, "so this was a very good experiment."

Salomon's son, Marc, 19, had injured his groin in a soccer game. Iams treated the leg, relaxing a network of interconnecting muscles. The result: no more groin pain.

"Within a week, Marc was playing soccer again," Salomon said.

In the past two years, Salomon has referred several of his organ transplant patients to Iams. "The majority of them have come back and said he provided significant relief from a series of musculoskeletal pains," Salomon said. "*Everybody* said he was a consummate professional."

Iams, who has taught PRRT to about 25 fellow professionals in two-day seminars, describes the process as "the missing piece to the puzzle in

treating sports injuries."

Among those most unlikely to find relief from the techniques are those with structural damage or neuropathic pain, such as reflex sympathetic dystrophy.

Justin Frandson, who operates an athletic development program at Scripps Clinic, became a believer after sending several injured athletes to Iams. So did Jeff Riolo, an agent for professional baseball players.

"It's absolutely unbelievable what John's doing," Frandson said. "I've seen a lot of healers in all avenues, and he's created something new. A breakthrough. I've had him take care of chronic neck pain in one visit."

Said Riolo: "I've seen it (PRRT) work effectively for 80 percent of the people I've taken to John. I tried it first on myself. Instead of daily pain in my arthritic knees, it's only sporadic, depending on how much activity I do.

"And I'm able to do everything I want: the treadmill, StairMaster, golf, stationary bike, fly fishing and tennis."

For more information about PRRT, Iams can be reached at (858) 485-7103.

Jack Williams can be reached at (619) 293-1388; by fax at (619) 293-1896; or by e-mail at: jack.williams@uniontrib.com