

# Therapists aim to relieve chronic pain with new technique

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HOUMA — People often assume that chronic pain is something you just have to live with — that chronic back pain doesn't hurt too badly, as long as you only get off the couch a certain way, or that chronic neck pain is bearable, as long as you don't turn your neck too fast.

Whether it's neck or back pain, muscle aches or severe headaches, chronic pain is something people shouldn't have to live with, according to owners of a local physical-therapy center. And patients shouldn't give up on finding a cure after trying only one doctor without success, they say.

Drew Rice and Nicola McKeon, co-owners of Back to Normal, a physical-therapy recovery center in Houma, are honing in on a new treatment to pain that they say is radically different than traditional physical therapy.

In addition to their regular physical-therapy work, the two are integrating a pain-relief therapy called Primal Reflex Release Technique into their practice. They've been using the atypical treatment for about a year and a half on patients and say they are amazed by the results.

"It really is like a miracle," said McKeon about PRRT, as the therapy is called. "It's a very gentle therapy that either works right away or it doesn't. A patient doesn't have to waste a lot of

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time and money before finding out if it will work for them."

For many, that therapy is working. According to the California-based doctor, John Iams, who is teaching medical workers across the country about PRRT, the pain-relief strategy has been clinically proven to reduce pain in 50 percent of patients who try it. In fact, many feel relief after their first or second visit.

Charlie Bush, a retired Houma dentist, has been a patient at Back to Normal for about three months, after a car wreck left the 69-year-old grandfather searching for relief from acute back pain. Bush consulted with his doctor, who advised he take muscle-relaxers. The pills worked, but once he stopped taking them, the pain returned. At the request of a friend, Bush made an appointment at Back to Normal for one session of PRRT.

Bush said the pain-relief treatment left him feeling better after just one session.

"At the time she was working on me,

I could tell the difference, because she would hold positions or do things until the muscles relaxed and then I would go home and be very sore from working with those muscles, and then I would progressively get better," he explained.

After a series of visits, Bush says his back is better and is now getting help from the physical therapists with some leg-strength problems he was experiencing.

"It works," he said. "I would recommend the treatment to anyone of any age."

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PRRT bases its science of healing on the body's automatic startle, withdrawal and protective joint reflexes. Though the very drastic versions of these reflexes seem to disappear shortly after birth, they remain with you for a lifetime,

McKeon said.

Sometimes, since the body is hard-wired for automatic responses, your reflexes might be kicking in a startle or withdrawal mechanism that the rest of your body is completely unaware of.

These automatic responses can be set off by any event in daily life. Sometimes they are set off by a car wreck or something very traumatic, or they can be constantly set off by smaller triggers, such as stress or even work.

"When you stay in this mode, it up-regulates the autonomic nervous system," McKeon said. "Eventually, this causes a painful response to a non-painful stimulus."

PRRT treats the body's unregulated system by a series of tapping and gentle movement that activate the opposing systems keeping your body from regulating. And though most patients, like Bush, describe it as a sort of pressure on the muscles, it is an exact science of locating trigger spots on the body that can affect one certain area and cause pain.

"The best part of the treatment is that we won't just keep wasting your time," McKeon said. "You'll know in two or three treatments if it will work or not. We won't just keep you coming, hoping that you'll eventually get better."

The treatment cost is \$70 per visit, but most insurance policies cover the procedure.

For more information, call 857-9097.