

The Importance of Knowledge: Part III©

Well, I'll just jump right in (I never know how to start these articles) and say that knowledge enables us to be more and more effective at alleviating the pain of the people we work on. I'll also say that the Onsen Technique is a unique body of knowledge because it combines the skills of an osteopath, a physical therapist, and a massage practitioner. Wow, you say, I can learn all that? Yes, I answer, one Volume at a time. Obviously, I don't mean that you will be taught all the skills of an osteopath and a P.T. The osteopathic skill we learn is MET which corrects structural deviations (Vols. 1 & 3). P.T.s know how to assess ROM and assign stretching and/or strengthening exercises so that the body may become reasonably balanced. You can learn these functional techniques in Volumes 2 & 4 along with the proper application of cross fiber friction, which can be an extremely effective tool for the LMP. This article will focus only on MET, and how it corrects structural deviations.

MET stands for Muscle Energy Technique; it was developed by osteopaths. It is simply the specific application of what I call Hold/Relax stretching. Most of you are familiar with this technique, which makes use of a property called Post Isometric Relaxation. For instance, if you wanted to stretch a tight hamstring, you would stretch it until you first felt resistance, have the client contract it against your resistance for 7 – 8 seconds (isometric contraction), have them relax it, and you can stretch it farther. Repeating this procedure 3 to 5 times results in the hamstring regaining its full range of motion. What's cool about MET is that you can apply it to the specific tight muscles that are pulling bones out of alignment, and correct any structural deviation that you find. I'd love it if you'd come give it a try.

Of course to do this, one has to be able to find the structural deviation (what's really going on with the bones, underneath all those muscles?) That's the next cool thing about this technique, we teach you to properly assess structure by palpating bony landmarks. In Volume 1 alone (Lower Body – Lumbar Spine & Pelvis) we teach you 12 different structural assessments, and then the appropriate corrections (very specific Hold/Relax stretches) for each possible deviation. You will examine high ilia, lumbar side-bending curves, SI joint fixations, pubic bone alignment, rotated sacrums, anterior/posterior rotations of the ilium, lumbar vertebral rotations, inflares and outflares.

Most of the Hold/Relax stretches in Volume 1 are what we call Type 1 corrections: they are specifically targeted at big, extrinsic muscles. However, even cooler yet, we can even target tiny intrinsic muscles! These are the muscles that span the facet joints between vertebrae (rotatories, multifidi, etc.). Did you know that if they are tight, they can prevent a facet joint from opening in flexion or closing in extension, and that this restriction causes a rotation in the vertebrae above the facet joint that's restricted? You can learn to assess rotated vertebrae, even if they're buried under those huge erectors! The corrections for these smaller muscle restrictions are called Type 2s and the way we access them is by proper positioning and a much smaller isometric contraction (only 10% effort). If they contracted harder, they would activate the much bigger overlying muscle, QL for example, and skip right over the smaller intrinsic muscles.

Is your brain having a hard time following all this? If you're like me, you learn by being told and shown, so come take a class. I'll just finish with a simple example of a client I had just last week. He had lain in bed for 3 days, flat on his back because of laser eye surgery. He had serious back pain. I assessed a rotated sacrum and compensatory L 5 (they were twisted in opposite directions). I first corrected the sacrum and then I corrected L 5 (as per protocol), and then his pain was gone.

~ Julie Bacon