

What can FMT (Functional Manual Therapy) do for your back pain?

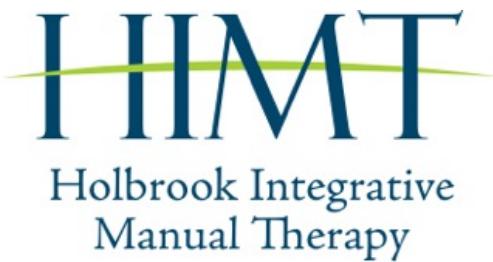
By Matthew Holbrook PT, DPT, CFMT, CSCS

There are many reasons one may suffer from the debilitating effects of lower back pain. For many it is the lack of mobility in a variety of areas of the body and lack of muscular strength, stabilization, endurance and control which puts additional demands on the lower back. Often times this lack of mobility and muscular efficiency can be due to a major trauma in one's life or it can be due to many small micro traumas from repetitive and chronic stresses. Major traumas can include car accidents, falls and sports injuries. The more common micro traumas include chronic postures like sitting at a desk or on a couch, inefficient lifting patterns, work related stresses as well as mental and nutritional stresses.

Before being able to strengthen muscles important for function it is of paramount importance to ensure that the body can access efficient movement patterns. When talking about lower back pain the structures that may demonstrate lack of mobility include those of the pelvic girdle including the pelvic bones themselves, sacroiliac joints, coccyx (tail bone), abdominal contents as well as the structures above and below this region including the hips, knees, ankles and thoracic spine and rib cage. Often time's lack of mobility in the cervical spine and shoulder girdles can contribute to lower back pain. The structures associated with this lack of mobility include joints, ligaments, tendons, bursa and most important fascia which is the web like connective tissue that supports the structures of the body. Of considerable importance is the mobility of the nerves and blood vessels as well as something called ground substance which have to move with the body as we bend, twist and turn. Specific and specialized techniques performed by a functional manual therapist can enhance the efficiency of movement of these structures which often makes it possible to decrease or eliminate long standing discomfort.

Over the past decade or so the term "core muscles" has become a bit of a buzzword in the fitness and rehabilitation arena. In my opinion this term is often times misused and overused by trainers, doctors and therapists. It is essential that we understand what a core muscle does and what it is. Core muscles are not so much a specific muscle but are specific muscle fibers in all muscles that have the ability to stabilize a joint when performing more complex movements. All muscles throughout the body contain both phasic (the fibers that move a joint) and tonic

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(the fibers that stabilize a joint for protection) fibers. Different muscles throughout the body have different ratios of tonic to phasic fibers. Around the areas of the lumbar spine and pelvic girdle the multifidus, psoas, quadratus lumborum, transverse abdominus, psoas muscle as well as the diaphragm and muscles of the pelvic floor have a great deal of tonic fibers which help to stabilize the lumbar spine in preparation for movement.

What actually occurs is something called the feed-forward mechanism. This is a way for the brain to send a signal to these specialized tonic fibers prior to any movement of a particular joint such as that between L4 and L5. This occurs when efficient movement occurs and in the absence of pain and trauma. Studies using ultrasound and functional MRI recently have shown that when injury occurs and pain is present this feed forward mechanism does not work properly.

An evaluation by a functional manual therapist can identify areas of immobility which may be affecting the symptoms of lower back pain. A functional manual therapist will also identify muscles which are unable to function properly and how this dysfunction can lead to poor movement patterns, which leads to painful movement. It is also important to note here that in my experience patients have these identified dysfunctions prior to the development of pain. This makes it much easier to treat dysfunction prior to the onset of pain. We should all be striving to have our bodies and their associated systems operate in their most efficient way. I believe that this will not only have an effect on our pain but will allow all the systems of our body to function at their optimal level and reduce the likelihood of certain diseases associated with immobility.

If you are interested in seeing how a functional manual therapist can assist you with your lower back pain or to just help you improve your function call Holbrook Integrative Manual Therapy to set up your first appointment.