

Visceral Manipulation

Viscerovascular Manipulation: Upper Body



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Visceral Manipulation – the missing link to better health

What is Visceral Manipulation?

Although relatively under utilised in modern physical therapy (a fact that, I'm glad to say, is starting to change), the art of Visceral Manipulation has been a part of medicinal cultures since pre-recorded times.

The word “visceral” refers to the internal organs of the body such as the stomach, liver and kidneys. Visceral Manipulation (VM for short) is therefore a hands-on-therapy that locates and releases points of tension within and around the organs that are affecting the body's ability to function optimally.

VM can also be called “organ-specific fascial mobilisation”, as it is carried out by gentle mobilisation of the connective tissue (fascia) around the organs. Fascia occurs throughout the whole body. It can be thick and strong like a tendon that attaches a muscle to a joint. Or it can be more elastic such as organ fascia, which gives the organs the mobility they need to move to the extent required for good health; an optimally functioning liver, for example, should move up to 30,000 times a day. Visceral Manipulation helps to both prevent and correct any restrictions of such movement, which would soon create other problems in the body, like musculoskeletal pain. In this way VM helps the body to exist in a state of harmony and balance.

What is the basis of Visceral Manipulation?

The science of Visceral Manipulation was founded by Physiotherapist and Osteopath Jean Pierre Barral who, while working in the lung disease hospital in Grenoble, France, observed how visceral restriction (in this instance of the lungs) could lead to changes in, and pain of, the muscles and joints. He went on to discover, through extensive research, that some 90% of all musculoskeletal problems have a visceral (organ) component. As such, physical therapies that don't address underlying visceral issues can often be short-lived even if they do cause an *initial* reduction in pain.

Barral was named one of *Time Magazine's* Top Six Innovators for Alternative Medicine. A multitude of studies have gone on to prove just how far-reaching the benefits of the VM method he developed can be – from 96% of a group of chronic lower back pain sufferers experiencing a marked improvement in their condition after having been given VM treatments, to another group of patients showing significantly positive changes in organ function via both X-ray and ultra-sound after VM treatments.

What can Visceral Manipulation help with?

Common problems that can be treated with Visceral Manipulation include:

- Sports and yoga injuries or restrictions
- Chronic back pain
- Hip, knee, shoulder, elbow and wrist pain
- Whiplash
- Sciatica
- Headaches and migraines
- Digestive problems such as bloating, constipation and IBS
- Emotional issues such as anxiety, stress and depression – there is groundbreaking new research which proves through brain Scans that the mind does not distinguish between physical issues and emotional issues.

VM can be used to break the cycle of any of these symptoms, unlocking complicated bio-mechanical distortions and allowing the body to regain healthy functioning and movement.

Successful resolution is about finding the areas of restriction that are specific to *you*, then allowing them to release in the way needed for your body to reorient itself towards better health. As such, VM is for anyone who simply wants to feel better in themselves.

Getting to the root of problems

If you pull the bottom corner of a T-shirt, you can feel how it starts to pull on your shoulders. In physical therapy we refer to this as a “lesional chain”. The problem with such a “lesional chain” when it occurs *within* the body is that you may not feel the restriction at its *origin* (in this analogy at “the bottom corner of the T-shirt”); you are likely only to feel the *final* effect on your joints and muscles (in this analogy as it pulls on your shoulders). The underlying reality, however, is that problems build up over time from the *original* point of restriction.

The aim of a VM therapist is therefore to find the *root* of the problem: by placing their hands on the body, they can use their professional training, anatomical knowledge and hands-on sensitivity not only to detect but also to unwind the original points of restriction. As they mobilise and elongate specific areas, a greater range of movement is restored, which can feel deeply relaxing, as though a weight has been lifted.

An example specific to yoga

Let’s say you’re having problems with your forward bending in postures such as *Paschimottanasana* (Seated Forward Bend) and *Supta Kurmasana* (Sleeping Tortoise) and you’re experiencing restriction or pain in your hamstrings. Most people’s natural assumption is that the problems are being *caused* directly by their hamstrings. However, as explained in the T-shirt analogy above, the problem may well lie elsewhere.

Factors to consider in this case are that the hamstrings connect to the pelvis, which connects to the large intestine, which then connects to the liver. When doing a forward bend, what needs to happen *internally* is for the liver to roll freely over the intestine. So if, for example, the *liver* becomes “stuck”, it will create a pull on all its associated structures – the large intestine, pelvis and hamstrings. This means that no matter how much you stretch the hamstrings themselves, they will not release until the *liver* restriction is released. A VM therapist will work carefully with your body to identify and decompress this root restriction, helping to restore full flexibility (both internal and external) and therefore ease and deepen your forward bends again. Hurrah!

In Summary: Is Visceral Manipulation for you?

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So... if you are having difficulty with certain yoga postures, experiencing long-term restrictions in movement, or suffering from pain or discomfort anywhere in your body (even if it’s not getting better with other forms of physical therapy) – or if you just instinctively feel that you’re capable of getting more from your body and can’t put your finger on what is holding you back – then it is worth getting checked out by a Visceral Manipulation (VM) therapist. As founder Jean Pierre Barral’s groundbreaking research proved, there is a 90% chance that it is the missing link to your problem.