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Understanding and Responding to Symptoms

If you start to experience symptoms, review the principles of ergonomics in Part Two to make sure you are following them as much as possible to avoid causing any further damage. Renew your focus on good body mechanics and pay particular attention to how you schedule clients and how many demanding treatments you give each day. Getting enough rest will be even more important as you focus on healing. You may find that being more vigilant with these prevention methods will resolve your symptoms. Hopefully you will be able to identify a specific cause for your symptoms, and addressing that cause will alleviate your symptoms. For example, you may find that using certain techniques aggravates your symptoms, and avoiding those techniques makes the symptoms go away.

It is also possible that you have been following all of the injury prevention principles correctly, but some non-modifiable risk factor, such as a prior injury, has caught up with you and is causing new symptoms. Whatever the cause, it is important to keep using the injury prevention techniques you have already learned, to help keep your symptoms from progressing.

It is equally important to seek medical treatment if your symptoms continue or progress, since putting off treatment can lead to a chronic and potentially debilitating injury. It can be difficult to determine when medical treatment is necessary, and many people hesitate too long before seeking evaluation by a healthcare provider. In this chapter, you will learn how to differentiate between the minor symptoms practitioners can experience in a physically demanding job, and more significant symptoms that indicate that you may be injured. You will also see how these symptoms arise when body tissues are stressed to the point of injury.

Recognizing the Typical Symptoms of MSDs

Musculoskeletal symptoms can range from the mild aches and pains that can accompany any physical effort to more serious symptoms that indicate a disorder requiring medical evaluation. The key to protecting your health is to remain attentive to your body, so you can recognize the very first signals it sends you, even if they are mild. These signals can indicate that something is wrong and needs to be addressed, whether that means changing your techniques, getting more rest, scheduling fewer clients or seeking treatment. By learning to notice symptoms early on, you can take the necessary steps to address the causes and treat symptoms quickly and effectively. Responding early and appropriately when symptoms arise is the best way to avoid chronic or serious injuries later on.

There are a number and variety of symptoms that can accompany MSDs. Swelling is a common symptom of injury, and is often accompanied by tenderness and a feeling of heaviness or fullness. Tingling sensations are typically a sign of nerve impingement, and can sometimes progress to a sensation of burning pain and even numbness. Muscular symptoms resulting from injury range from weakness and fatigue to guarding, hypertonicity and spasm.

The most common symptom by far of MSDs is pain. It is often the first symptom that arises when injury occurs. Much of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of pain and its underlying mechanisms, to help you better understand this fundamental and sometimes complex symptom.

Table 6. Typical Symptoms of MSDs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscular weakness or fatigue • Muscle spasm, hypertonicity or guarding • Hypersensitivity (e.g., being touched on the affected area is unpleasant or intolerable) • Pain during activity, for example, when working or performing everyday activities (e.g., opening a jar, door knob, car window or faucet, brushing your hair or teeth, writing) • Pain following activity • Tenderness • Aches • Burning • Twinges • Crepitation (popping or clicking when joints move) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling or inflammation • Numbness and tingling (paresthesias), especially when it awakens you at night • Feeling of fullness, heaviness or congestion of the affected area • Involuntary or uncoordinated movements (e.g., tremors, twitches, tics, sudden flexion/extension of fingers, inability to hold objects steady in the hand) • Clumsiness • Loss of function • Hesitation to use a limb to hold objects or support your weight • Protecting the affected area, holding it stiffly • The realization that the affected part of the body has not felt “normal” for a while, like it did previously
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You may have some of these symptoms and not others; some symptoms may go away or may be replaced by new symptoms. The presence of even a single symptom is reason enough for concern. Certain symptoms can indicate a serious injury, illness or condition, and should be evaluated and treated without delay.

Table 7. Symptoms That Require Immediate Medical Attention

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense pain • Any pain that lasts more than 7 days in a row • Inflammation that is moderate to severe, or lasts more than five days in a row • Unexplained clumsiness, weakness or loss of function • Any numbness, tingling or burning sensations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain that radiates down an arm or leg • Symptoms that wake you up at night or prevent you from falling asleep • Changes in skin color • Symptoms that change or worsen rather than improving.
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