

Tackling the root of the pain

THE PERMANENT PAIN CURE

By Ming Chew
with Stephanie Golden
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Manhattan-based physical therapist Ming Chew promises a simple, drug-free exercise and rehabilitation programme that can be done in just 15 minutes a day.

His brand of alternative medicine centres on the fascia, a type of connective tissue that holds muscles together and wraps protectively around nerves and organs.

The thinking here is that many injuries and chronic aches and pains can be healed by addressing scarring and tightness in the fascia.

This type of treatment is known as myofascial release, which includes early strands like Active Release Techniques (ART), created in the mid-1980s by a Colorado chiropractor named Michael Leahy. Chew's claim to fame, however, is his adaptation of myofascial principles to cure the likes of NBA player Jason Kidd of the New Jersey Nets.

Chew describes the fascia as a kind of three-dimensional web weaving throughout the body. Tight, contracted fascia compresses veins, for example, preventing blood from circulating and weakening the body's ability to fight infections. He also explains his theory that joint problems often have their roots in fascial problems, as kinks in the tissue prevent muscles and bones from moving freely. Surgery, he argues convincingly, is a kind of injury to the fascia too.

Going from this holistic, interconnected

approach, Chew's exercises target different parts of the fascial chain. As he puts it: "I don't care where the pain is; I care where the problem is." Hence, a person complaining of lower back pain may be advised to deal first with his psoas, a major muscle in the lower abdomen, and with buttock muscles.

The Ming Method presented by this book involves a series of spinal and fascial stretches, bolstered by a preparatory diet of water (2 to 3 litres a day, depending on gender and weight), reduced sugar and trans-fatty acids, and fish oil and other fascia-supporting supplements.

I put the permanent pain cure to the test on my niggling, little post-pregnancy lower back pain. The spinal stretches, with names like "dead roach" (you really do look like a flipped-over cockroach doing this), are fun yet not too demanding.

The targeted fascia stretches, however, can be slightly complex to get right, especially when there are more words than pictures to guide you.

The third step in the programme, after the pain goes away, is to strengthen the problem area. These are mostly traditional and practical squats, lifts and push-ups.

Don't expect immediate relief though. This self-help method, stresses its creator, needs a longer time to work, compared to hands-on sessions with a therapist.