

Vacuum Manual Therapy for Spinal Alignment

By Anita Shannon

Soft tissue manipulation has proven itself to be beneficial for Scoliotic conditions, and Vacuum Manual Therapy is providing a valuable “missing link” in treatment protocols. Adding this method of decompression aids the tissue with releasing deep patterns that hold the bony structure in a forward or sideways twist associated with conditions such as Hyperkyphosis, Hyperlordosis and Scoliosis.

Soft Tissue Memory- Neuromuscular function creates soft tissue memory from trauma such as injury and repetitive movements. The three dimensional fascial system, as seen in “Strolling Under the Skin” by Dr J.C. Guimberteau, can also get stuck in position from the same causes . The strands of fascia become tangled and dehydrated from inflammation, and vacuum decompression helps draw fluids into the area while it gently pulls the strands apart.

The Diaphragm- One of the most critical areas to address in working with spinal curvatures is the diaphragm. If all or part of the diaphragm is elevated, the surrounding structures have no choice but to accommodate the abnormality. The diaphragm can be affected by so many life experiences; compression during birth and a multitude of other childhood injuries and illnesses, falls that “knocked the wind out” of the lungs, asthma or chronic bronchitis, pregnancy with a large child, and even traumatic experiences such as car accidents or physical abuse.

One case that stands out is a young man who was beaten and robbed in his home. His spine had curved into the position he took to protect himself and would not release. While it was a challenge to access his diaphragm, it proved to be the main cause of his dysfunction. Once it was released to return to its normal position, the upper body structures could revert as well.

Vacuum Manual Therapy makes the process of releasing the diaphragm so much easier, and if manual techniques are added in, accessing the diaphragm is much more comfortable after the vacuum has been used to pull it down.

Hypertonic vs Hypotonic Tissue- Once the diaphragm has been addressed, the next step is to release hypertonic tissue and strengthen hypotonic muscles. For most spinal curvatures, anterior and posterior muscle groups must be included to address all compensatory patterns.

Slow pumping movements are used to begin initial gentle release of hypertonic tissue, and then graduate to long gliding movements to stretch and elongate. Areas of hypotonicity work best with stimulating pumping movements and active interaction with the vacuum to contract the tissue while it is stretched up into the cup.

Working with Rods, Plates and Cables- So many people have had corrective surgeries and appliances implanted after being diagnosed with scoliosis or other spinal curvature disorders, while others are told to simply live with the condition. Vacuum Manual Therapy is so effective at relieving soft tissue issues, and this gives appliances the ultimate opportunity to assist the structure to stay in place.

One very fascinating case presented itself recently, and the young woman has had multiple surgeries since late childhood that included implantation of Harrington rods, plates and cables. We began work on

the diaphragm and lower intercostals and discussion began about childhood injuries. Due to her posture, I began work on the anterior torso and then moved up to release the anterior neck. As the session progressed to the posterior of the body, evidence of some kind of trauma showed itself in the shoulders and neck.

As it turned out, she had found out from her mother that she suffered a very serious fall down cement steps when she was 3-4 years old, and basically fell down the stairs on her head. Patterns showed up in her tissue indicating compensatory patterns and restrictions and I followed them around her body with the vacuum cup. By the time her session was done, her shoulders were lying flat on the table and her posture had changed considerably. Now the appliances can work even better to keep her structure in place, and a series of treatments will be required to recondition the soft tissue.

The results in her first appointment were a great indication of the positive outcome from a customized treatment protocol!

Childhood injuries- As seen in the case above, there can be a logical event in childhood that could begin the development of scoliosis, hyperkyphosis and hyperlordosis. Working with the extra- large cups and observing the tissue can offer big clues about the origin of dysfunction in the form of restrictions and discolorations. These can clearly be seen through the vacuum cup as it is moved over the area, and restrictions look like large dents, while the discolorations can range from black, brown, yellow, gray, red, and even green. All of this is old blood and other substances that became trapped at the site of injury.

The truly interesting part is helping the person being treated to remember what incident or activity could be showing itself in their tissues. Childhood events such as falls in gymnastics and ballet, equestrian pastime injuries, car and bike accidents, and even years of mucking out horse stalls can clearly show itself in the restrictions and colors under the skin. It is an amazing moment to realize that even experiences so long in the past can still have an effect on our current posture and movement.

Vacuum Manual Therapy provides a new window into assessment of spinal curvature conditions, as well as aiding in the release and re-patterning of the tissues to maintain optimal spinal health. The addition of powerful micro-cup magnets into the treatments has produced even more amazing results!

More Information- There is so much to learn about scoliosis and other spinal curvature disorders, and truly effective treatment incorporates a team of professionals that often includes Medical Doctors, Chiropractors, Physical Therapists, Exercise Physiologists, and Massage Therapists. Specific exercises, some of which involve a special “ladder”, or even particular yoga movements that are designed to help support correction of curvatures, are also a big part of an effective treatment regimen.

ANITA SHANNON is licensed in massage therapy and cosmetology since 1983. An educator since 1990, she appears at national chiropractic, massage and spa conventions and currently presents workshops on ACE Massage Cupping™ and MediCupping™ at international locations since developing these brands of bodywork in 2002. She has published multiple articles in **Les Nouvelles Esthetiques**, **Massage Today**, **Massage & Bodywork** and **Massage Magazine** and has created five educational videos on vacuum therapies. Anita was inducted into the Massage Therapy Hall of Fame in 2011.