

Tennis Ball Acupressure

by Devin J. Starlanyl

Excerpted from "The Fibromyalgia Advocate: Getting the Support You Need to Cope with Fibromyalgia and Myofascial Pain Syndrome", by Devin J. Starlanyl, © 1998, and Fibromyalgia and Chronic Myofascial Pain: A Survival Manual, ed 2, 2001 © Devin J. Starlanyl and Mary Ellen Copeland, New Harbinger All rights reserved.

Please be aware that we cannot hope to put all the information from ours and several other books for patients on these disorders. Please get additional information from one of these sources. We have listed some in the bibliography.

There are many misconceptions about the use of tennis balls, and many people are unaware of what a wonderful physical therapy aid they can be. Balls of different sizes can be useful for self-therapy on myofascial trigger points (part of CMP, not FMS). They should not be used if you also have strokes, a head injury, or anything else which might increase your intracranial pressure.

Place 2 tennis balls in a knee sock, with a knot at either side of the balls. They should be tight together. Then you can roll them down the sides of your spine, starting about the middle of the back of your head, as you lean against a wall or on the floor. If you have extremely sore TrPs, start the tennis ball compression sitting in a chair or sofa.

A single tennis ball can often get at TrPs you can't. Leaning against a wall, with a tennis ball between you, the TrP and the wall, is no one's idea of fun. It hurts to work out those bumps and lumps andropy bands of TrPs. You still have to identify your perpetuating factors and deal with them, but tennis ball acupressure is handy, inexpensive, and effective.

Start by leaning against the wall, with the tennis ball between the back of your neck and the wall. Do not press directly on the spine. Start with the ball along one side of your spine, right under your skull. Work both sides. Slowly work the ball down to the shoulder area, raising the arms to shoulder height to open the shoulder blades as you do the upper back. Roll the ball to cover all areas of the upper and lower back. You can reach much of your sides as well. Don't neglect the sides of your hips. If you have a lot of TrPs on the rib area, check for paradoxical breathing. Your belly should expand as you inhale, not as you exhale. You don't need to use a tennis ball. Some people feel that lacrosse balls are better for the back and hip areas.

To work the belly, lie on the floor on the tennis ball and roll on the ball, slowly up and down, covering the area from your sides to your rib cage. Do not use this form of physical therapy if you have abdominal or pelvic

disease. You will find that there are some "screamers" that will take a while to work out. Remember the area where the leg joins the trunk, and the pubic arch, and the thighs.

For myofascial trigger points, you need to apply pressure until the TrP releases. Start with enough pressure to get resistance, and press until you get a release. Then press a little harder until you get another release. Keep going until the TrP releases totally. We often have layers of TrPs. You can't do everything at once. Pace yourself. The pain can be considerable, but remember, you are the one applying the pressure. Go at your own speed and start slowly. You may not feel the soreness until the next day. You will be activating the TrPs. You may get a temporary increase in pain level, as with any form of physical therapy. Stretch afterwards. A hot shower can be comforting, or a soak in Epsom salts. I use a bocci ball for my belly and a golf ball for my feet. Find out what works for you.