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Feel all knotted up from trigger points?

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More than 39 million Americans got a massage last year, according to the American Massage Therapy Association. Lucky, lucky people. They're probably all floating around town stress-free while the rest of us hunch our achy shoulders. Good news -- relief is three words (and a few dollars) away -- trigger point therapy. Turns out those knots in your muscles are called trigger points and that applying targeted, repetitive (often painful) pressure to them releases the pain. If you can tolerate 10 to 30 seconds of teeth-biting pain three or four times a session, you'll be rewarded with looser, more relaxed muscles. Follow with regular stretching and hydration and you should be relatively ache-free. You can pay a masseuse to treat your trigger points or go the self-help route with these two products:

Invented by an Arizona massage therapist, the **Healthy Body Ball**, \$21.95 at www.HealthyBodyBall.com, claims to be the first home-massage tool based on trigger point therapy. The purple rubber ball is studded with 10 nubbins designed to simulate a therapist's fingers. Rub the ball over muscles and find relief from headaches, carpal tunnel syndrome, back pain and a host of other maladies. It sounds dubiously simple, but those nubs are shockingly strong. It took me a bit to find the sweet spot in my achy shoulder (a therapist would have been helpful), but once I did, a few slow-motion rolls with the Body Ball actually made it feel better.

Also invented by a massage therapist, **The Body Back Buddy**, \$39.95 at www.BodyBackBuddy.com, employs trigger point therapy on a larger scale. The s-shaped tool is 27-inches long and has 12 strategically placed knobs scattered throughout its curves. The idea is to utilize size and shape to access hard-to-reach spots. Hook the Buddy over your shoulder for neck pain, lay on it for lower back relief and so on. It's stiff, unwieldy and a bit awkward to position at first, but a few consults with the instruction manual proved very useful. I hung the Buddy over my shoulder and was surprised how easy it was to knead into my upper back. The whole experience was a bit like using a back scratcher, ridiculous looking, but completely addictive.

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