

BOOK REVIEW

Save Your Hands: The Complete Guide to Injury Prevention and Ergonomics for Manual Therapists. 2nd Edition

By Lauriann Greene and Richard W. Goggins (2008)

Save Your Hands! (SYH) approach to avoiding work-related musculoskeletal disorders is encouragingly multifaceted. It recognises that for manual therapists musculoskeletal disorders gradually creep up on us. We may notice the odd ache or twinge in our hands or arms sometimes and carry on regardless. These mild niggles gradually increase in intensity and frequency until one day after a particularly demanding session; the aches are painful and persistent. It is this insidious and gradual build-up of injury that puts all manual therapists at risk. This thorough book is a 'must-read' to help prevent these injuries.

SYH's says that our joints are 'weak links' in the body, particularly vulnerable and prone to injury. If one 'weak link' is weakened, the other links in the chain have to work harder and as a result can too become damaged. This means an injured joint in the finger can put strain on muscles in the arm and shoulder. Protecting these 'weak links' is key to injury prevention. However, SYH's does not just focus on our therapy work but also encourages us to be aware of non-work activities that contribute to injury. For example, gardening, which entails a good deal of bending, kneeling and use of hand tools, can contribute to lower back, knee and upper extremity conditions. Hand-intensive activities and hobbies, such as typing on a computer, writing, playing an instrument, opening jars, lifting heavy bags of groceries can all place additional stress on our body. The message is clear that we must be especially vigilant, as combined with a manual therapist's work-related risk, this puts our overall risk of injury at a much higher level. A total of 20 hours manual work a week is considered full-time compared with the office working week of 35 hours.

Having clearly stated made their case for injury-prevention, the author's then provide comprehensive advice. A range of topics aimed at helping minimise risk are covered and include:

1. Ergonomics – this chapter assess your equipment and tools in your workspace to help reduce your risk.
2. Developing good body mechanics.
3. Managing your techniques.
4. Reducing stress in your musculoskeletal system in daily activities.
5. Strengthening and stretching exercises.

The final chapter looks at recognising the typical signs of musculoskeletal disorders, diagnosis and treatment of these injuries.

Many training schools teach massage techniques that are inherently risky and often little attention is paid to proper posture and setting up your work area to reduce pressure on our 'weak links'. It is commendable that SYH's goes some way to re-dressing this lack of education and poor training standards and is recommended for any student or practitioner of manual therapy. Keep it with you at all times!

Review by Tracey Goulding, acupuncturist and massage therapist.

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