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## Understanding and Managing Low Back Pain: A Self-Care Guide

If you are experiencing low back pain, there is a good chance that trigger points in various muscles are causing or contributing to the problem. This is true even if you have problems in your spine such as a bulging disc or arthritis. Muscle tension can displace vertebrae and cause compression of nerves and discs.

Much of back pain, including low back pain, is actually referred pain. For example, trigger points in the buttocks often cause low back pain, and vice versa. In addition, there are often trigger points above and below the area of pain that are contributing to the problem.

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## The Connection Between Trigger Points and Acupuncture

Trigger points are small, sensitive areas in your muscles that can cause pain both at the point itself and in other areas of your body (referred pain). These points often correspond with traditional acupuncture points, which isn't surprising given our growing understanding of how the body's myofascial (muscle and connective tissue) system overlaps with traditional acupuncture meridians. When you apply pressure to these points, you stimulate the same nerve fibers that respond to acupuncture needles, making self-massage a powerful tool for home care.

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## Getting Started with Self-Massage

The key to effective self-massage is gentle, sustained pressure rather than aggressive rubbing. You'll need a massage ball - while a tennis ball works to start, I recommend the Yoga Tune Up therapy balls for their durability and perfect density. When working on a point:

- Start with light pressure and gradually increase as the tissue releases
- If you find yourself holding your breath, that's a sign you're using too much pressure
- Spend no more than a couple of minutes on each area.
- Repeat every 2-3 days
- If you experience any nerve sensations (tingling, numbness, or sharp pain), adjust the position of the ball

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## Key Areas to Address

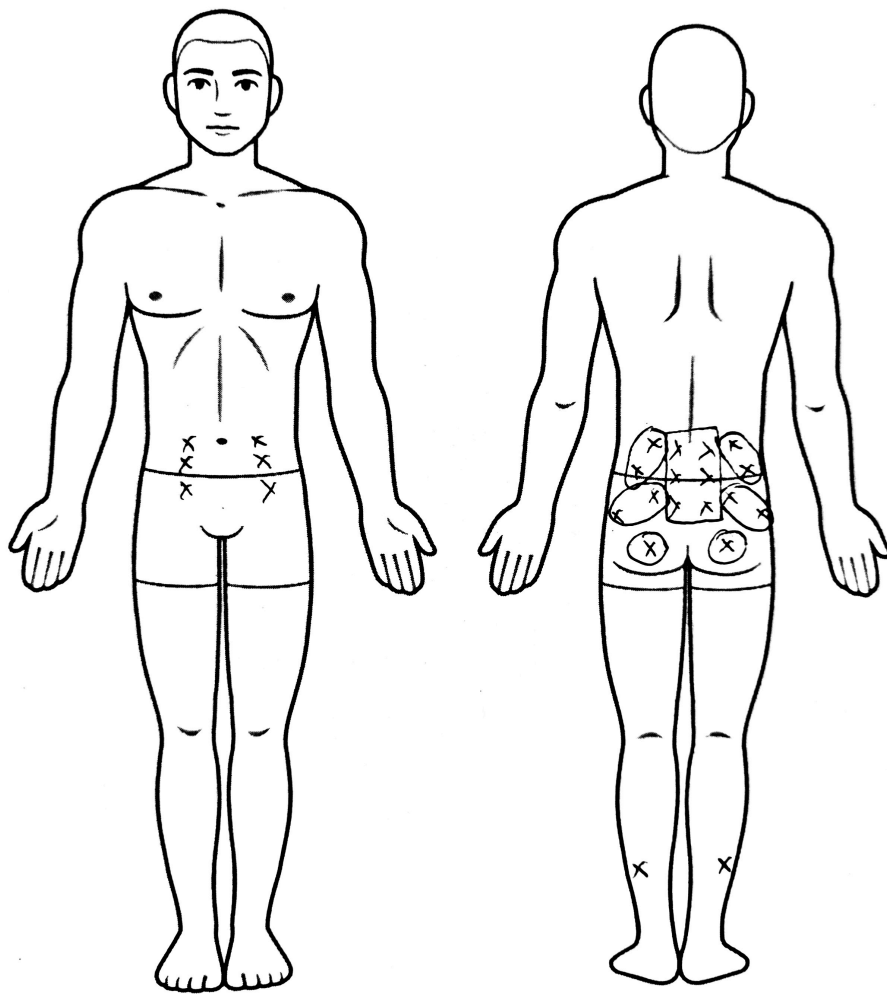
#1 Points along the spine in the area that hurts. Be sure to travel a little above and a little below. You might find some additional trigger points you didn't realize were there.

#2 Points in the glute muscles, paying special attention to the top of the pelvis, moving out to the side of the hip, center of the glute, and near your sit bone. Two muscles in this area that often contribute to back pain are the piriformis and gluteus medius. Pay special attention to this area if you get pain or numbness that travels into your hip and/or leg.

#3 Points in the quadratus lumborum. Look for points between the top of your pelvis and your bottom rib, farther out from your spine.

#4 Points in the deep abdominals, particularly the psoas. These points are usually accessed from the front of the body.

See the illustration below for help locating these common trigger points. If you're currently working with me for acupuncture, I'll go over this at your next appointment. I've also included some helpful video links from myofascial expert Jill Miller.



Helpful Video Links:

[Low Back](#)

[Glutes](#)

[Piriformis](#)

[QL](#)

[Psoas](#)