

Neurac aids in physical therapy

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After several months of ignoring an ache in my left arm, I finally gave in and went to see the doctor. An MRI showed bursitis and a possible tear in the rotary cuff of my left shoulder, so the prescribed treatment was physical therapy.

My physical therapist, Megan Bishop, used traditional methods like strengthening exercises, manual muscle therapy and massage, and also introduced me to a new treatment that's just beginning to be recognized in the United States.

Neuromuscular activation (Neurac for short) is a therapeutic exercise developed in Norway that uses Redcord equipment -- a collection of red-colored cords, loops and slings -- to put the patient in positions that concentrate on the weak muscles that need strengthening. The exercises are pain-free because the cord-and-sling setup supports you as you work.

"We were exposed to Neurac about three years ago," says Gabrielle Shrier, a physical therapist and one of the owners of Core Conditioning, which has two locations in the Los Angeles area. "It was different than anything else we'd ever used, and we've seen some amazing things with it. It's a state-of-the-art technique that's gotten good results with patients."

Shrier says on the evaluation level, the Neurac method helps the physical therapist to easily find the muscles that are not working correctly.

"In treatment, you're able to off-load some of the body weight so that you can train the muscle to function at the level it can, then slowly add body weight to get the muscle strength back," she adds. "It takes away the compensatory pattern you develop when you've had an injury."

Each time Bishop put me in the Redcord setup, I could feel muscles working that I'd never been aware of before. I also smiled inside at the bright red cords themselves. The color red is thought to be the color of good luck, or vibrant life, in Chinese feng shui, an energy vibration that the Norwegians must have been in synch with when they designed the equipment.

It's not easy for new treatments to gain acceptance in any medical community. Michael Leonardi, who runs the distributorship for Redcord in the United States, says while the Neurac method has been widely used in more than 30 countries for decades, it's just starting to gain a foothold in America.

According to Leonardi, the new treatment system is used in hospitals such as Beaumont Hospital in Detroit and the University of Michigan Hospital System in Ann Arbor, as well as at the Lake Placid Olympic Training Center.

"Neurac has value in both the rehabilitation and fitness industries," Leonardi says. "It's a way for rehabilitation professionals to create wellness programs through functional exercise. It's a continuum of care, and a great conduit between rehabilitation and fitness."

I'll be happy when my arm no longer bothers me, but it would be nice to keep working on Redcord. It's not often that you look forward to exercising on equipment that just makes you smile.

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