

EMPOWERED CHOICES

*A Guide to Healing
Head & Neck Pain*

DANIELLE MALLET

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Credit to the Monterey Peninsula Writers Group. I couldn't have finished this book without all of your help!

*This book is dedicated to dreamers, creatives,
disembodied souls interested in befriending their body,
all the loved ones lost to suicide, my fiancée, my children,
my siblings, my family and friends who raised me, and to
8-year-old me who never gave up on her dream to be a writer.*

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

It happened in a busy Trader Joe's parking lot. I fainted from dehydration and menstrual cramps. My head hit the gravel the way a bowling ball drops onto a lane. I was knocked unconscious, went into a seizure, and was rushed to the hospital where they treated me for internal bleeding.

This head injury back in 2004 was the catalyst that got me interested in learning how to heal my head and neck pain, so I could help others heal too. I had accumulated many injuries in my youth—a cracked collarbone, whiplash, concussions, and a shoulder misalignment—but this traumatic brain injury made the head and neck pain I was living with unbearable.

Looking back, I wish I had a resource to help me navigate what was working and what wasn't. There was a lot of trial and error, which was to be expected, but with some guidance, I'm confident I could have healed sooner. That's why I became a Functional Movement Coach; Personal Trainer, Massage, and CranioSacral Therapist—and why I wrote this book. Drawing from my own personal battles and struggles, *Empowered Choices: A Guide to Healing Head & Neck Pain* is full of useful information on how to better cope, remedy, and heal from head and neck pain. I wrote it to empower you to become your own healer. Chances are you have endured pain for a long time. I believe the only

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way to truly heal is to become an active participant in the process of healing.

After earning my bachelor's degree from Naropa University, I worked to become a certified yoga teacher with a focus in yoga therapy, a California certified massage and CranioSacral therapist, a certified National Academy of Sports Medicine personal trainer, and most recently a certified Foundation Training instructor. For eight years, I have coached clients to gain stability, mobility, and strength with my business—*Get Well with Danielle*.

It took years of learning about the body through yoga, massage, and CranioSacral Therapy before I found Foundation Training, the final puzzle piece to healing my head and neck pain. Ultimately, it was a combination of these modalities that got my body to a place of peace. Though the puzzle pieces to your healing may be different, this book will help you find what you need faster.

Have you suffered a concussion or whiplash? Is your neck weak or stiff? Do you lack mobility or feel pain after using technology too much? Are you a new mom with neck pain from staring down at your adorable baby? Have you tried to improve your situation by going to doctors, chiropractors, yoga classes, massage therapists, or personal trainers—only to still be in pain and feel dejected? If yes, I understand. Rest assured: I have been where you are and come out the other side. This book, full of new options, is for you.

Do you feel stuck because you're not sure where to start? Or did you try one thing only to find it didn't work and then lose momentum or hope? This book will give you practical tools to help you move out of pain. Do you struggle with the motivation to exercise because some days even simple movements, such as getting into the car and looking over your shoulder, are difficult? I made this book for you.

Section 1: Head and Neck Injuries covers a range of upper body injuries. Chapter 1 and 2 address two common head and neck injuries: concussions and whiplash. I share what happened when I experienced these injuries and explain basic anatomy of the head, neck, and shoulders to offer an understanding of what can go wrong with these injuries. The more you understand, the easier it will be for you to decide which modality will help most. Chapter 3 talks about depression, a common and often unknown side effect of a traumatic brain injury. Each chapter ends with one or two healing puzzle pieces that helped me and can help you too.

Section 2: The Four Steps to Heal Head and Neck Pain offers a practical breakdown with manageable steps. You'll learn ways to relieve your pain, identify good vs. bad pain, and exercises to practice. I'll also show you how to find a healing professional, how to decide who to work with, and which questions to ask once you're working with the chosen practitioner.

Section 3: Resources and Reminders guides you toward making empowered choices for your specific neck pain. I cover various types of head and neck pain that come from previous injuries, too much technology, being a new mom, and more. We revisit all of the steps you can take to heal. Finally, chapters 11 and 12 break down the types of massage & movement resources available to you.

Simple, straightforward, and safe, the exercises in this book will increase stability, mobility, and strength in your neck, and, as a result, your head and neck pain will diminish. You'll learn about the movements that hurt your head and neck, and the ones that make it stronger.

Use this book in the way that works best for you. Think of it as a Choose Your Own Adventure. It doesn't have to be read from beginning to end. If my personal stories are helpful and interesting,

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then by all means read them, but know that all the resources are here for you to find them as quickly as possible. You can flip through to use it as a reference guide and review the healing puzzle pieces at the end of each chapter. Then when you find a healing puzzle piece that sounds helpful, such as CranioSacral Therapy, skip ahead to the suggested chapter to find more information.

However you approach this book, my hope is that you use it to feel informed and empowered with the choices you're making to heal your head and neck pain.

MY HEAD AND NECK PAIN

In 2003, I went to college in Boulder, Colorado and realized three things:

1. **I couldn't do a sit-up.**

I remember lying on the grass with a group of friends, and when it was time to get up, I had to roll over on my side to push up to a seated position. At the time, I had severe neck pain from previous concussions, whiplash, and overall physical weakness.

2. **I struggled with yoga.**

I spent most yoga classes mentally comparing myself to the able-bodied people in the room. I hated my body, especially my neck, wrists, and lower back, because of my reoccurring pain. I was convinced that plank, downward dog, and many of the standing postures in yoga were created to torture people. It took years to develop a practice that felt good.

3. **I had limited body awareness.**

When faced with mindfulness and wisdom of the body classes, I felt awkward, out of touch, and not equipped to

handle the inner feelings that arose. I resisted befriending a body I'd spent years disliking. The only time I was aware of my body was when it was in excruciating pain. I learned to live with chronic neck pain. The only relief I got was from chiropractic neck adjustments and massages, but the pain always returned after a few weeks. It was infuriating. I was too young to feel that out of shape.

I became determined to answer two questions: Where was the pain coming from, and how could I get rid of it—permanently?