



The Bowen Technique has helped thousands of patients with problems as diverse as breathing difficulties and dyslexia. **Emma Amyatt-Leir** finds out why the technique is so powerful

The heal *everything* technique

The Bowen Technique is a hands-on complementary therapy with apparently miraculous results for a huge range of conditions, from diarrhoea to dyslexia. Said to 'reset the body so it heals itself' and to 'balance and stimulate energy flows, resulting in a deep sense of overall relaxation,' the uninitiated might dismiss it as just another massage or a version of shiatsu, acupressure or osteopathy. Having experienced

all of the above, however, I found the Bowen Technique to be subtly but profoundly different – and, dare I suggest, rather more effective.

The technique is named after Australian Tom Bowen (1916–1982), a highly intuitive healer without any formal qualifications, who treated some 13,000 patients a year at his peak. Although self-taught, he innately knew what was needed, by looking at and touching the patient's body.

Gentle healing

Performed while lying clothed, through a series of gently rolling connective tissue moves using thumbs and fingers, the Bowen Technique feels like a friendly hand squidging your fat while you doze. The basic Bowen 'move' distorts a relaxed muscle or tendon and then rolls over it without sliding on the skin. Although every treatment will be different, depending on the patient's problems,

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Bowen manipulation is deceptively gentle, but can have a powerful, lasting effect

most practitioners start on the lower back with four of these 'rolls' up either side. The therapist then, rather surprisingly, leaves the room. According to Julian Baker, one of Europe's foremost practitioners: "A key feature of the Bowen Technique is that of the therapist leaving between certain moves in order to allow the work to take effect. With the move being as subtle as it is, the body and the brain need time to establish a) what has happened and b) what

action if any needs to be taken as a result. Far from being a passive action, it's actually allowing the work to start to take effect." The lack of distracting skin stimulation and the limited number of moves is thought to focus the body's attention on exactly what needs healing. It is also what makes it so different to massage.

The therapist returns quietly after a couple of minutes and performs the next series of moves – in

my case, with stiff shoulders, around the upper back, neck and jaw. After a few more rolls, the therapist disappears again. I lost count of exactly how often this happened as I became more and more relaxed. All I knew was I didn't want it to end.

Scientific evidence

Not even Tom Bowen could explain exactly how his technique worked. What is known is that it »

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operates through the fascia: the uninterrupted, three-dimensional web of tissue that extends from head to toe, front to back, interior to exterior, which effectively holds our body together. The hormones released during pregnancy can relax the fascia, while the fight-or-flight response is an example of rapid fascial contraction.

Acupuncture works by manipulating the fascia, as do forms of osteopathy. Indeed much of the latest research into meridian systems, acu-points and myofascial trigger points correlate noticeably with the location of the Bowen moves. The difference is that Bowen is both non-invasive and extremely gentle. However no Western doctor can explain how or why it works.

Dr Toby Murcott, former BBC science correspondent, says “The basic idea of drawing the brain’s attention to a problem then allowing the body to heal itself does not fit in with a conventional view of physiology. It’s likely that working with

Many Bowen therapists trained after benefitting from the technique themselves



a kindly, interested therapist will make anyone feel better, but it’s harder to explain the reported emergency asthma treatment and frozen shoulder studies in this way.”

Surprising success

Despite the lack of scientific understanding, research proves that it works, and very well. A study of 39 patients for the Migraine Action Association showed a decreasing number of attacks and/or

reduced intensity of migraine for 79.5% of patients.

Tom Bowen’s wife suffered from asthma, which he effectively treated. Research currently being undertaken by Alastair Rattray of the European College of Bowen Studies is showing, “The attacks lessen more and more until they no longer seem to be a problem. There are many successes recorded at all ages.”

The Bowen Association UK undertook a study into frozen shoulder under the auspices of Dr Bernie Carter of the Metropolitan University of Manchester. They found “a significant improvement in shoulder



The Bowen therapist performs a number of gentle moves, usually starting on the back

At a Bowen session...

- * In the initial consultation, your therapist finds out what is wrong with you
- * You then lie on a massage couch. Provided your clothing is suitable, you remain dressed
- * Warm towels are used to cover the area not being treated
- * The therapist performs the gentle moves, usually starting on the back, and leaving the room between each set of moves
- * After the treatment, the therapist helps you to sit up while you have a drink of water and the after care is described

"The absence of pain in the morning was a delight"

Name: Neil Endicott

Age: 47

Occupation: fireman

Fitness: excellent

Problem: constant back pain for three years.

Other treatments tried: sports physio and chiropractic

Number of treatments: five over a six-week period, followed by one per month for five months

"My first impression was this Bowen thing was a load of nonsense. The treatment was so gentle I thought it couldn't possibly help."

"After my first session, my back felt worse for a day or two but then improved until two weeks later I had no pain standing or walking; although leaning forward and bending still hurt.

"After the second appointment the pain was worse again the next day but then much better, until I wrenched it doing some DIY.

"After the third session the reaction was almost immediate with worsened pain on my weak spot. But it was gone completely in the morning and 'stayed gone' even after a long walk. I was amazed.

"My first impression was this Bowen thing was a load of nonsense. The treatment was so gentle I thought it couldn't possibly help"

"After the fourth appointment I wrenched my back picking up a screwdriver and previously this would have settled into constant pain, but it cleared in 24 hours. I then enjoyed the Christmas holidays cycling, running and exercising and my back was fine throughout. The absence of pain getting up in the morning was a delight.



"After treatment five I took a 10-mile run, uprooted a tree and went go-carting with no ill effects. I continued with monthly top-ups to ensure my back stayed problem free and took part in an endurance event that involved rowing, cycling and running - with no problems at all! By September I could easily cycle 100 miles [and ski-jump - see above!]."

mobility and associated function for all participants, with 70% of participants regaining full mobility (equal to the non-affected side) by the end of the treatment."

They also reported "a high level of satisfaction with the therapy, a commitment to using Bowen in the future should they require it... and the intention to recommend the therapy and therapist to friends and family."

It also appears to be extremely effective as a remedial therapy for those overcoming sports injuries. The Bowen Technique improves rehabilitation time, regardless of how old or recent the injury may be.

Chronically ill patients benefit as well as the disabled. Some of the diseases that have demonstrated improvement are multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy.

The extremely gentle nature of Bowen makes it suitable for everyone from the newborn to the very elderly; indeed there are free children's clinics up and down the country for profoundly ill children.

New beginnings

According to Julian Baker, "another interesting element to Bowen is its ability to 'access all areas'. Although a client might present with a conventional shoulder, neck or back pain, it's a common occurrence that when they come back the following week, other things not mentioned have changed or resolved. A good example of this was an 80-year-old man who came to see me with shoulder pain. On presentation for his second treatment, he was very excited, as not only had his shoulder pain disappeared, but his haemorrhoids, a problem for over 40 years, had also vanished."

Tom Bowen had many apprentices during his working life, accounting for the many official schools of Bowen Technique around the world. The therapy was first brought to the UK in 1993. The huge number of practitioners who have trained here in the last 15 years, many of whom became therapists as a result of benefitting from the technique themselves, attests to the huge and growing popularity of this therapy. *

BOWEN CONTACTS

* Emma visited Rita Eccles, Lewes Bowen Clinic
Tel: 01273 488009 www.bowensussex.com

* Neil visited Janie Godfrey, Frome Bowen Clinic
Tel: 01373 451558 www.janiegodfrey.co.uk

* For treatment in the Essex area, try
www.essex-bowentechnique.co.uk

* Bowen Association UK www.bowen-technique.co.uk

* European College of Bowen Studies
www.thebowentechnique.com

* To find a therapist: www.bowentherapists.com

* Children's Clinics: www.bowen4children.org.uk

* For childhood asthma information:
www.relieve-childhood-asthma.com

Sessions last for an hour, and prices vary from £25 to £70 depending on location.

The average number of treatments required is between two and four, although acute problems take less time to treat than old chronic conditions.