



Want to target muscle pain the gentle way? This massage therapy could be the answer

### What's it all about?

Created by Australian osteopath Tom Bowen in the 1950s, Bowen technique is a soft tissue massage therapy that lightly manipulates connective tissue and muscles to ease pain. Treatment consists of a series of gentle rolling moves with pauses between them, giving the body time to benefit from each set. The big difference from other massage therapies, such as physio or chiropractic, is that Bowen uses light movements instead of deep tissue work with lots of pressure. Practitioners treat the body as a whole. 'The position of your knee can be the reason you're having back or neck pain. The body is connected,' says Julian Baker, instructor at the European College of Bowen Studies and author of *Bowen Unravalled* (Lotus Publishing, £16.99).

### How does it work?

'Therapists work on specific tension areas in order to stimulate the body to heal itself,' says Baker. The gentle, rolling moves over the body are as light as softly pressing on your eyeball; if it feels uncomfortable, it's too hard. The breaks in between moves allow the body to heal. 'Intervals set up a dialogue between different parts of the nervous system, which lets the manipulation take effect without shocking the body,' says Baker. Unless you're having

treatment prescribed by your doctor, therapists ask you not to have deep tissue treatments alongside Bowen, as therapies such as chiropractic could interfere with its effectiveness.

### Is there research behind it?

Bowen has only been used in the UK for around 20 years and research is limited. But studies support claims it can help lower back, shoulder and neck pain. A study in the *Journal Of Bodywork And Movement Therapies* revealed those being treated recovered from hamstring injuries more quickly.

### What can it help with?

The most effective results are linked with muscular pain, in particular neck, shoulder or backache. 'Results can be seen in musculoskeletal, metabolic and, due to the calming and stress-reducing nature of the therapy, emotional problems,' says Claire Harrison, chair of Bowen Therapy Professional Association committee. Less obvious complaints Bowen has been reported to help with are: fibromyalgia, fertility and pregnancy issues, lymphoedema, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, hay fever and asthma. Therapists won't treat these specifically, but they can help manage them. 'For example, without knowing it [with deep tissue therapies] you could be compressing the diaphragm and

restricting breathing, which could affect asthma,' says Baker. The movements are so gentle they can be done while you're sitting down and clothed, which is why Bowen is also popular among children and older people.

### What happens in a session?

You'll be asked to lie on a massage table (if you're uncomfortable you can sit or even stand) and your therapist will use their fingers and thumbs to roll your muscles, tendons and ligaments. Usually, it's followed by a pattern of massages in the lower back called 'stoppers' that open up the spine. After each set the therapist will leave you alone for a few minutes; an appointment can last anything from 20-50 minutes. 'Post-session you'll feel taller, more relaxed and you may even experience an emotional release,' says Harrison. 'A day or so later you should have improved flexibility, movement and less pain.'

### Where can I find out more?

In the UK it's not a regulated therapy, so there's no legal requirement to have training. You can find a reputable practitioner at the Bowen Therapy Professional Association ([www.bowen-therapy.co](http://www.bowen-therapy.co)), or The European College of Bowen Studies ([www.thebowentechnique.com](http://www.thebowentechnique.com)). Prices for treatment range from £30 to £50. **U**