



At six feet six inches, Henry Wyndham was used to the occasional twinge in his back. But this time the pain was excruciating and unrelenting, and he had endured it for six months without relief.

A bulging disc—common in older people, and Henry is 59—was causing sciatica, and medicine has little to offer other than rest, warm compresses, exercise and pain-numbing medication. He had had an epidural, but that hadn't made much of a difference.

The alternatives didn't seem to help either. "I think I had tried everything. You name it, I did it—from acupuncture, chiropractic and osteopathy to a healer in Glastonbury. I was so desperate that I even went to see a man who was good with horses!"

Nothing worked, and Henry was facing the prospect of remedial surgery when a chance remark put him on the road to pain-free living. He was holidaying in the Hebrides at the time, and his friend told him about the Bowen Technique—a therapy he had never heard of—and a practitioner who was on the island.

Feeling he had nothing to lose, Henry booked an appointment and, to his astonishment, felt immediate relief for the first time in months. What is especially astonishing is that the Bowen practitioner appears to be doing very little: there's no pulling or thumping, but instead the most gentle of touches, a rolling across specific points on the body with fingers and thumbs.

In effect, say Bowen practitioners, the subtle touches are reactivating the brain's innate healing capabilities that get forgotten in the rush and stress of modern life. Sceptics of course claim it's all hogwash—just a placebo and wishful thinking by the patient.

Henry isn't quite such an easy pushover. If he were so open to the placebo effect, he would have experienced it with the osteopath, the healer or even the man who was good with horses. For another thing, Henry works in the world of fine art where the deceitful always look to trip up the unwary.

He is European chairman of the auction house Sotheby's, and he personally handles the big headline-grabbing auctions. He put the gavel down

The Bowen Technique reactivates the brain's innate healing capabilities that get forgotten in the rush and stress of modern life

Going,  
going,  
GONE

Sotheby's chairman Henry Wyndham suffered bad back pain for six months until he tried a therapy he calls "the best kept secret in the world"

## The therapist's story

Ghislaine Vaughan was a yoga and exercise teacher when her partner, an osteopath, told her about the Bowen Technique. It was an introductory session to a therapy that would require nine months' training — something she didn't want to take on at the time.

Despite her reservations, she went along and was "flabbergasted" by what she saw. It seemed as if the person running the course was doing almost nothing to the volunteer patients, just a series of light touches with the fingers and thumbs on different parts of the body. Yet, at the first break when the volunteer was asked if anything had changed, she revealed that a breast lump that was worrying her had completely disappeared.

"I suppose that was an extreme response, but I have seen thousands of people get well after just one or two sessions," said Ghislaine. She can provide her own testimonial to the therapy; a practitioner was able to heal her weak ankle, which prevented her from doing her yoga exercises, after just one session — and she had suffered with it for 15 years.

Ghislaine qualified in 1998 and today she works from clinics in London and Chichester. She divides her time between Bowen, yoga and healing with the Bach Flower Essences, another therapy that fascinates her.

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Bowen practitioner Ghislaine has seen thousands of people get well after just one or two sessions

Researchers have found the Bowen Technique to be effective for improving hamstring flexibility and treating frozen shoulder, a painful condition that restricts arm movement

on the sale of Rubens's *Massacre of the Innocents*, which set a new auction record sale price at the time of £49.5 million; soon after, he broke his own record when he auctioned off Giacometti's *Walking Man* sculpture for £65 million.

His other claim to fame is a fleeting appearance, playing himself, in the Angelina Jolie movie of 2001, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, and he has also been immortalized in Jilly Cooper's novel *Pandora*, in which he is depicted relaxing ahead of an auction "in a deep, English Fern-scented bath".

Out of the bath and back in London, where Henry lives during the week with his wife and three sons, he immediately did a web search for a local Bowen practitioner and settled on the Berkeley Clinic, Ghislaine Vaughan's practice.

"I remember when Henry first came in. He had trouble walking, and he said he had suffered from chronic back pain for months and that he had tried five different therapies, none of which had worked," Ghislaine recalled.

Most of Ghislaine's clients come in with bad back pain, so Henry didn't present too much of a challenge.

Although Henry felt relief immediately afterwards, just as he did with the therapist in the Hebrides, his healing was gradual, and it would be a few sessions before he could say he was completely free of pain.

Henry saw Ghislaine once a week for three weeks. "We like to have a little time between sessions to allow the brain to assimilate the messages," explains Ghislaine — and this was gradually reduced to less frequent visits over the following three months.

"I could feel my back getting a little better all the time. It really was quite amazing. I think that the Bowen Technique is one of the very best kept secrets," said Henry.

Henry was making headlines for a

different reason the following summer, in August 2012, when he was in a shooting accident that almost cost him his sight. He was airlifted from a grouse shoot on a Scottish moor to hospital after 52 pellets blasted into his face from another shooter's gun.

Had he not been wearing glasses, he would have been blinded, he said later. "When I woke up and found I'd not lost my sight, I felt I'd won the lottery."

The experience brought home to him the importance of sight — and the way it is casually lost to millions of people in the poorer nations — and so he decided to do something about it.

Although used to taking taxis and chauffeur-driven cars, Henry decided to walk the 191 miles from coast to coast across England, a feat that took him 15 days — and raised around £1 million for the Orbis charity, which provides specialist eye treatment throughout the developing world. He completed it last May with fellow walker Guy Roxburgh.

His elation was short-lived. He joked: "Fifteen minutes after completing the walk and dipping our feet into the North Sea at Robin Hood's Bay, a group of old ladies, still looking remarkably fresh, told us they had completed the walk in one day less than us!"

But at least his back held out. "I had no trouble with the back, but my knees almost went, however." And the bulging disc? "I can only assume it cleared up," said Ghislaine. "We don't diagnose so I can't say for sure."

Whatever happened, it worked, and Henry goes back occasionally for what Ghislaine calls 'maintenance' visits. "The body gets out of kilter with all the stresses and strains of life, and it's good that it gets frequent reminders."

To find a qualified Bowen practitioner in the UK, contact the Bowen Therapy Professional Association: [www.bowen-therapy.co](http://www.bowen-therapy.co); [ask@bowentherapy.org](mailto:ask@bowentherapy.org). uk; 0844 5617173



## The Bowen story

Mystery surrounds the origins of the Bowen Technique. It's known that Tom Bowen, a sports masseur and healer in Australia, developed the therapy, but he didn't teach anyone what he was doing and it's not entirely clear how he came to develop the method in the first place.

It probably came about as the result of a combination of intuition, trial and error, and watching other bodyworkers who were achieving remarkable results, often with serious sports injuries, in the 1950s and 1960s.

In the end, his work was carried on by several therapists who carefully observed Bowen at work. The most important of these was Ossie Rentsch, who brought the technique to the wider world after he set up the Bowen Therapy Academy of Australia.

Bowen died in 1982 at the age of 66 after contracting an infection in hospital where he had had a leg amputated because of 'poor circulation'. His other leg had been amputated years earlier. Nine years before his death, Bowen had testified before an Australian government committee to try to explain his therapy. He reckoned he had treated around 13,000 people for a wide variety of health issues and had succeeded in 88 per cent of cases.



## What to expect

**Who can benefit?** In theory, Bowen 'reawakens' the brain's innate healing abilities, so any disease may be treatable. But it's most commonly used by people with back pain, sports injuries, migraine and whiplash after a car accident.

**What happens?** You keep your clothes on, but it's sensible to wear something light so the therapist has good contact with your body. Many patients are astonished by how little seems to be going on — just the lightest of touches over areas of the body. Sometimes an area is touched just once. The therapist may be doing any of the following: 'the Bowen Move', which involves rolling the soft tissue at a precise point with the fingers and thumbs; 'the stoppers', where parts of the body — especially the spine — are used as reference points for other moves; and 'the breaks', where the practitioner will leave the room and allow the body to begin its own healing. The most

immediate sensation is one of deep relaxation and peace, and it's not uncommon to fall asleep during the session. A session will typically last around 40 minutes.

**And afterwards?** Initially, you may be asked to make weekly visits. Between sessions there are no special requirements about diet or exercise that you have to follow; the one golden rule is that you should not have any other therapy while undergoing Bowen, as therapists say it may interfere with the 'messages' being sent to the brain. Other than feeling relaxed, you may not experience any other sensation at first. But it's common for people to feel enormous changes in the body days afterwards; 'it's like I've been hit by a truck' is not an unusual observation.

**What will it cost?** Rates vary, but expect to pay around £95 for the introductory session, and £80 for every follow-up session. Depending on your problem and sensitivity to the therapy, you may need between three and five sessions.

## What's the evidence?

Researchers at Coventry University found the Bowen Technique effective for improving hamstring flexibility.

A group of 120 volunteers with hamstring problems were given either Bowen therapy or a 'fake' placebo therapy for just one week; the Bowen group showed 'significant' improvement according to a flexibility measurement, while those given the fake treatment saw no difference in their flexibility ratings.<sup>1</sup>

It can also help treat frozen shoulder, a painful condition that restricts arm movement. In a study of 20 patients, the technique "significantly eliminated and improved symptoms".<sup>2</sup>

Also, nursing staff in Australia with work-related injuries took less time off work and reduced the level of injury claims over a nine-month period after receiving Bowen therapy.<sup>3</sup>

### REFERENCES

- 1 JBodyw Mov Ther, 2011; 15: 281-90
- 2 Complement Ther Nurs Midwifery, 2002; 8: 204-10
- 3 Aust J Holist Nurs, 2005; 12: 31-4