

Bowen: the gentle treatment with profound effects

One of Europe's fastest growing complementary therapies is the Bowen Technique. Developed in Australia and only brought to the UK in the 1990s, it's now increasingly recognised as a therapy which can help with a very wide range of conditions. *By Christine Burd*

Bowen Technique has been shown to help not only with the muscular and skeletal problems other therapies tend to address - like back, neck and shoulder pain, whiplash, tennis elbow, frozen shoulder, carpal tunnel syndrome and sports injuries - but also with conditions such as arthritis, asthma, hay fever, eczema, migraine, IBS, lymphatic drainage, Bell's Palsy, stress, pre- and post-natal problems and even fertility. It can also help babies with colic, children who have glue ear, who bed-wet, or who have suffered trauma or exhibit behaviour problems. Several practitioners now specialise in helping clients with particularly difficult conditions, such as cerebral palsy, autism, ADHD, MS, ME and fibromyalgia - with very positive results.

How it works

The Bowen Technique was developed over many years by the Australian therapist Tom Bowen (1916-1982). Tom studied many forms of

remedial bodywork and other methods of healing, taking from each discipline what he felt was most effective.

Many of the gentle moves made by a Bowen practitioner are over recognised trigger points, acupuncture points and meridians or on specific points on muscles and joints associated with the lymphatic system, muscle reflexes and balance.

Bowen works primarily, but not exclusively, with the fascia - the web of connective tissue that "wraps" the whole body. One of the most profound effects Bowen can have is in shifting the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), which controls over 80% of bodily functions, from sympathetic to parasympathetic dominance, releasing stress at a very deep level. This could explain why even a small number of Bowen treatments frequently reactivate the recovery process, when healing from trauma, sickness, injury or surgery has stalled or reached a plateau.



The treatment

There is no pulling or cracking of joints, no insertion of needles and no painful manipulation. The Bowen therapist, using only thumbs and fingers, makes subtle but dynamic, rolling movements over muscles, tendons and soft tissue at precise points on the body. The pressure exerted is gauged by the practitioner, according to the age and physical condition of the client - very gentle moves for a tiny baby with colic or an elderly client suffering from arthritis, with the option of more robust moves for a well-toned athlete presenting with a sports injury.

A Bowen treatment aims to release tension in the body and rewrite the messages being received by the brain, in order that healing, re-aligning and balancing can take place. Some clients become so relaxed that they fall asleep during the session. A treatment normally takes between 45 minutes to an hour, and includes periods of rest, to allow the body to absorb the information it has received and initiate the healing process.



Finding a therapist

The Bowen Therapists European Register (BTER) is the UK's largest body of qualified Bowen therapists. Its helpline and website have more information about the training and the therapy, including a DVD demonstration and a 'find your local therapist' facility.
www.bowen therapists.com
Helpline: 0844 561 7173
Email: info@bter.org



Short-term (acute) injury is usually resolved in one to three treatments, while long-standing (chronic) conditions may require several more Bowen sessions. Many clients return regularly for "top-up" treatments, to boost their feeling of health and well-being and to strengthen their immune system.

Training

Depending on the time available to study and attend courses, becoming a Bowen practitioner can take from one to two years. Most individuals have made the decision to train in the Technique after experiencing the benefits of Bowen themselves.

The initial training usually consists of 5 separate workshops, each of 2 or 3 days'.

Students are encouraged to leave plenty of time between the workshops, to practise and to compile a comprehensive portfolio of case studies. They are closely monitored at each stage of training and must take final written and practical exams.

In addition to their Bowen qualification, BTER-accredited practitioners must obtain a Diploma in Anatomy and Physiology and a First Aid Certificate. They are also required to attend regular professional development courses to enhance their skills, and are fully insured.

Bowen in practice

Case study 1: Sylvia - pain in the face

Sylvia, 64, had suffered from trigeminal neuralgia – severe sharp pain on the side of her face accompanied by facial spasms – since the 1970s. She had a major flare-up of her symptoms in September 2008, and in desperation arranged to see a consultant neurologist privately. He prescribed medication and indicated that surgery might be required.

The condition continued to affect her life dramatically: chewing, cleaning her teeth, putting on make-up, talking – and even lying in bed – caused great pain, and the facial spasms were very embarrassing. She found it very difficult to mix socially.

In December 2008 Sylvia visited Stoke-on-Trent based Bowen therapist Christine Cahalin. Her condition immediately improved, and over the next few treatments the pain and twitching – despite a setback with a tooth abscess – has almost completely disappeared. Her consultant neurologist said that

Bowen had produced "a dramatic response".

Case study 2 : Adrian - asthma
Adrian, 7, had been asthmatic since the age of three. He regularly used a Ventalin inhaler and had to make regular visits to an asthma clinic. His Peak Expiratory Flow – the key measure of his ability to breathe effectively – was consistently recorded at below 200, a relatively low level.

Last October he suffered an acute attack which required treatment at an A&E department and enhanced medication. Having heard positive reports from another parent about Bowen, his parents took him to see Denbigh-based Bowen practitioner Tony Crimes. After his first Bowen treatment his PEF recorded close to 220 and within three more weeks reached a level of 250, which he had never achieved before. He was signed off from his asthma clinic in January, and, after monthly treatments his PEF has consistently risen, recently recording a high of 300.



Christine Burd is a Bowen therapist based in Manchester. She is Communications Officer for the Bowen Therapists European Register (BTER), the UK's largest body of qualified Bowen therapists.