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IN THIS ISSUE...

- **Help from Head to Toe** -- Bowen Technique Bodywork Helps Ailments from Head to Toe
- **Say Good-Bye to Weak Bones, Low Energy and Any Age-Related Ailment**
- **Take Care** -- Private In-Hospital Caregivers for Safer Hospital Stays
- **Cure for Memory Loss from Backyard Herb**

HELP FROM HEAD TO TOE

Mike, a reader from Illinois, told me about the Bowen technique, a unique Australian bodywork, that has been used for years to treat a wide variety of conditions, such as asthma and other respiratory problems, low back pain, colic, carpal tunnel syndrome, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, frozen shoulder, knee pain, sports injuries, headaches (including migraines) and gastrointestinal disorders. It is completely safe and appropriate for everyone -- from newborns to the frail and elderly.

Cynthia Rose, a Bowen practitioner in New York City, told me that Tom Bowen developed the technique. It is based on the same premise as soft-tissue manipulation used by sports team trainers. Today, the Bowen technique is practiced in 31 countries.

WHAT IS IT?

Bowen is a therapeutic soft-tissue manipulation technique that is applied to the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the body very gently and with minimal pressure. "It's not massage, it's not acupuncture and it's not chiropractic," says Rose. What Bowen practitioners actually do is gently roll the skin over specifically prescribed points on the body. Rose describes it as a three-part combination move -- the practitioner takes some slack skin, applies a little pressure and then moves the skin over the body structure.

A session may last 15 minutes to one hour. Clients wear loose, comfortable clothing, although sometimes the maneuvers are performed on bare skin. Typically, a Bowen session will begin with basic relaxation moves that are performed on the lower and upper back and on the neck and shoulder areas. It eventually may progress to the little hollow right below the sternum, which helps relieve asthma and breathing problems. Rose teaches this maneuver to clients with asthma who use it when they

feel the tightness or constriction in their chests that signals an attack. Performing Bowen on the temporomandibular joint in the jaw can help migraines, symptoms in the eyes and, especially, emotional conditions.

THE KEY: RESTING AND INTEGRATION

What makes Bowen unique versus massage and other hands-on techniques is that, for a good part of the session, the practitioner is not even in the room, says Rose. Typically, the practitioner will perform one or two maneuvers or parts of maneuvers, and then he/she will leave the room for a minimum of two minutes, but sometimes up to 10 or 15 minutes. Why?

"This gives the body a chance to process the information that was just put in," Rose explains. "The resting time really is important. When I have had Bowen performed on myself, it felt almost like the plucking of a guitar string, a vibration resonating out from the spot of the initial contact." Some people feel a warmth coming into the area, some people feel a subtle shift. Very often, people will say that they suddenly feel a pain in the hip or some other area of the body. That is a transitional correction during the body's response to treatment. The body needs time to integrate these changes in order to heal, so the resting period is crucial.

Integration continues after the client leaves the practitioner's office. Rose tells about one of her clients, an 81-year-old man who came in with his back curved forward like the letter C and his chest caved in. He complained that he did not have the strength to hold up his head. He committed to two treatments. When he came back for his second one, a week after the first, he was standing in an upright position, with his head sitting perfectly on top of his shoulders. Rose says there had been some improvement immediately following his first session, but the big changes happened in the intervening week, as his body integrated the new information and adjusted itself.

As gentle as Bowen is, sometimes after session people will experience aching muscles, mainly due to a release of toxins from the body tissues. "We always advise people to drink a lot of water and walk at least 20 to 30 minutes a day in fresh air following a treatment," says Rose. In addition, clients are advised not to take hot baths or use ice packs, or to participate in any other kind of bodywork or energetic therapies while they are in the midst of Bowenwork or for a few days afterward. This is because the Bowenwork is very subtle and other inputs can confuse the body's systems. Rose says that if she is seeing a client who is in physical therapy, she schedules the Bowen session after physical therapy or has the client schedule his physical therapy appointments four or five days later to allow for integration.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

No one fully understands how and why Bowen works. Generally, it creates a balance in the autonomic nervous system that increases relaxation and improves immune system function. The Bowen moves seem to encourage a sort of 'conversation' between the brain and the muscles, Rose explains. Energetically, it works the same way acupuncture does, she says -- through the fascia of the body. The fascia is the continuous material that covers all of our internal organs, every muscle, every bone. It is continuous, there is no break in it, and this is why, in acupuncture, when a needle is placed in the foot, a headache will go away. Bowen works in a similar way.

The fascia 'transports' the Bowen moves throughout the body, resulting in structural corrections that may be far from the site of the actual maneuver.

With Bowen, as with all energetic medicine, Rose says, the practitioner is just facilitating change. The body already has all the information it needs to correct itself. We are simply taking away blockages to facilitate communication between body and mind or making corrections in patterning. Once we make those corrections, the body is free to return to homeostasis, to balance, and an optimally healthy climate.

There is no standard number of sessions. Depending on the individual's condition and receptivity, one session might be enough. Typically, Rose says, she will prescribe at least two Bowenwork sessions, so she can check progress in between and monitor the changes. For more information on the Bowen technique, and to find a practitioner near you, visit the Web site www.Bowenwork.com. There are practitioners throughout the US.

Be well,



Carole Jackson
Bottom Line's *Daily Health News*

Sources...

Help from Head to Toe

- Cynthia Rose, certified Bowen practitioner and acupuncturist, New York City.

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