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Helping the Body to Rebalance and Repair

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My Blog

The Bowen Technique - Lymphatic drainage

Posted on 13 January 2013 20:06

Choice Health & Wellbeing International Trade Journal - April May 2010

The Bowen Technique - Lymphatic drainage
by *Janie Godfrey*

We can all get swollen feet or ankles from being on them too long, or when we're on holiday in a warm, humid climate and even those relatively mild and transitory occurrences of swelling can be uncomfortable and perhaps will even restrict certain activities. Certainly the lovely dress shoes taken on holiday may not fit for the moment and you know what Cinderella's sisters felt like.

But many people live with lymphoedema, the constant swelling, usually in limbs, which is uncomfortable, restricting, unsightly and can be an invitation to infections.

Lymphoedema is the result of an impaired lymphatic drainage system which can no longer remove the volume of lymphatic fluid within a given area of the body. This lack of normal drainage produces tissues that are filled with protein-rich stagnant lymph. If there is even the slightest break in the skin, bacteria can enter and thrive in this fluid, reproducing quickly and causing serious infections that can spread rapidly.

People with lymphoedema are particularly at risk for cellulitis, an infection of the skin, usually in the lower limbs. Even a small reduction of the swelling of lymphoedema is welcome and there are nurses that specialise in treating this condition, using the manual lymphatic drainage treatment.

But it has been found that Bowen Technique can also be very helpful for lymphatic drainage. More than a decade ago now, lymphoedema nurse Eilish Lund wrote up her experiences using Bowen on her patients. She was amazed and delighted with not only the volume reduction but in the pain relief that Bowen produced.

Over the past year or so, I have been treating Margaret, age 67, who was recommended to try Bowen by her lymphoedema nurse. Seven years previously, she had had uterine cancer and the uterus and ovaries were removed. Three years after that, her right knee was replaced. She came for treatment with lymphoedema in both legs, especially the right knee area, although the ankles and feet were very large and puffy also.

She had not been able to wear regular shoes in several years. She was wearing thick support stockings to try to manage the swelling. Her feet and legs were often tingling and hot feeling and sometimes it felt like 'toothache' in one leg, especially when in bed.

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Her husband is disabled as a result of arthritis and 2 strokes and she was worried that she was not going to be able to 'keep going'. In spite of all this, she is a very optimistic and cheery person. So she came to Bowen with eagerness to see what it was all about.

During the week after the first treatment, the pains in her feet diminished and she had more energy. She felt good at the Keep Moving exercise class. The problem had definitely improved and her ankles weren't nearly as swollen. She was still getting a lot of tingling in her toes and feet and up the legs, especially just above the right knee replacement, but she said it now felt 'different' – hard to day exactly how.

After her second treatment, she reported some pains across the tops of both feet for a few days which then cleared and the decrease in swelling in her legs, ankles and feet was less than the week before. She was delighted to be wearing regular socks instead of support stockings and – best of all – she was fitting into shoes she hadn't worn for a long time.

The week following the third treatment saw these improvements holding well, plus she noted that her balance was better. Her energy levels were also consistently better and when they flagged a bit, she recovered more quickly.

After some months of Bowen treatment once every 5 weeks, the lymphoedema nurse took leg volume measurements and 'couldn't believe the amazing reduction in leg volumes!' Margaret had one incident of cellulitis which flared up on her feet and ankles and this set her back a bit and it took a few months to really be clear of the effects of it in pain and redness and swelling.

The Bowen procedures that have been most helpful with Margaret's condition are the hamstring, knee and ankle procedures. Whilst these sets of moves are used for all manner of musculo-skeletal problems and dysfunctions of the legs and feet, they include gentle 'teasing' moves that address the lymph nodes behind the knees and follow along the centres of the hamstrings and between the gastrocnemius muscles, promoting the circulation and assisting in lymphatic drainage.

On a global scale, accurate statistics on the prevalence of lymphoedema are difficult to determine. One reason is that many cases are never diagnosed accurately. Another reason is that it is often not reported. But a sampling of several government researches estimate there are between a low of 100 million and a high of 200 million men, women, and children around the world with some degree of lymphoedema.

'If only we could Bowen the world', we Bowen Technique practitioners always say!

With much admiration and appreciation for the work of those who practice Manual Lymphatic Drainage and all the dedicated lymphoedema nurses who work to make a difference to those who suffer with this condition.

© E.C.B.S & Janie Godfrey *Janie Godfrey is a Bowen Technique practitioner in Frome, Somerset and has been in practice since 1999.*

Contents provided by the European School of Bowen Studies (ECBS)

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