

The Bowen Technique

The most common of complaints – sorting out back pain

by Janie Godfrey

Probably the most common complaint taken to the army of doctors, physios and therapists in the world will be back pain. Certainly this is so if the statistics are anything to go by. Millions of people are affected; millions of workdays are sacrificed to it and the estimated cost to the country for back pain alone runs into the millions of pounds. The problem needs a “million dollar” answer and the Bowen Technique probably comes as close as any therapy can to providing it, with Bowen therapists consistently seeing a significant improvement or complete resolution of back pain and dysfunction in a good 80% of cases.

Case History: Neil Endicott

Dob: 1971

Occupation: fireman

Fitness: excellent

Activities: keen sportsman and cyclist

Neil had a history of back problems going back at least 3 years. He had had chiropractic and sports physio treatment in the past. Chiropractic had ‘unlocked’ his back, but the discomfort and dull pain remained. The core stability programme he followed with the sports physio had helped him not to injure his back for a year or so. In the three months preceding his first Bowen treatment, he had had discomfort and pain on the lower left side of his back and then, two weeks previous to first appointment he had really hurt it while doing car maintenance. He had sharp pain on most any movement: leaning forward, bending, standing up and also when walking.

The sort of long-term, up-and-down, acute-and-chronic pattern of Neil's back problems are typical of a great many people – perhaps the majority of people who have back problems. They feel it's never really bad enough to go down the path that would lead to consultants and scans but it is always an area that feels vulnerable at least or in severe pain, at worst. They have to be careful with what they do or the back might ‘go’ at any time. And when it has ‘gone’, it really hurts and restricts their activities considerably.

Neil had heard about Bowen from a colleague in the fire service and thought he would give it a try. His first treatment was on 25 November. He later admitted that at his first treatment he thought to himself that this Bowen thing was a load of nonsense. The treatment was so gentle and light and I (the practitioner) kept leaving the room for the two minute breaks that are part of the treatment throughout each session, that he thought it couldn't possibly produce anything in the way of improvement for his back.

When he came for the second treatment a week later (2 December), he reported the back had felt worse for a day or two and then started improving to the point where he now had no pain when standing or walking although the pain was still there when leaning forward or bending over. Third treatment on 12 December and he reported that the pain was worse again the day after the treatment but the day after that, his back was much better and it continued that way until he wrenched it doing some DIY work and the pain wasn't clearing quickly. At the fourth treatment on 19 December, he reported that after this third treatment the reaction was almost immediate with the worsened pain at the point of his weak spot. But, he went to bed that night and it was gone completely in the morning and it ‘stayed gone’ even with taking a long walk. He was amazed although he still felt paranoid about how vulnerable his back is and kept ‘checking’ it for any signs of pain – but none appeared.

His fifth appointment was after the Christmas holidays, on 9 January. He was doing very well. He had wrenched his back picking up a screwdriver and his past experience would have meant that this would then settle in and become the usual constant pain, but it cleared in 24 hours. He then enjoyed the holidays with cycling, running and exercising and his back was fine throughout. He commented that he was noticing – and delighting in - the absence of any pain when getting up in the mornings.

We then left a break of a month before the next treatment and when he came on 8 February, he reported that he had been fine. He was doing things he wouldn't have been able to do over the past 3 or so years: a 10 mile run, uprooting a tree, go-carting, etc. He was still happily noticing that he had no pain getting up in the mornings.

Neil continued with monthly top-ups for March, April and May just to make sure that his back continued to be completely problem free. In May he said he had been part of a team of 6 in an endurance event that involved rowing, cycling and running for 9 hours, 9 minutes and 9 seconds on a 10 minutes on-10 minutes off rotation. NO back problems at all!

Neil came for a Bowen top-up in August and again in October as he had had a few little warning twinges in his back as a result of his cycling and lifting and lugging some heavy equipment in his work, but nonetheless was really chuffed that he had done a 100 mile cycle ride in early September in an excellent time and with no back complaints. At his October top-up he also reported the great news that he and his wife were expecting triplets!

Since the arrival of his three sons, Neil has experienced the usual exhaustion of a new parent, times 3. As the boys have grown, Neil's back has been properly challenged by the lifting and carrying of his ever-heavier boys. He has had a few twinges with his back over the nearly three years now since their birth and has booked in for a Bowen treatment either when he feels any twinges or every 3 – 4 months, as a precaution. His back has never returned to the constantly painful state it was in before Bowen and he is able to do all that he wants and needs to do with his family, his sports and his work.

With many thanks to Neil Endicott for permission to share his case history

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