

Introduction to The Bowen Technique

A hands-on style therapy that does not use force, pressure or manipulation, the Bowen Technique is becoming increasingly popular. **Claire Nelson** explains what involved and what to expect.

More people are turning to alternative and complementary therapies to improve their health and wellbeing. One method that is becoming increasingly popular is the Bowen Technique (also known as Bowen therapy).

The Bowen Technique is a holistic, remedial therapy, based on the work of Australian osteopath Tom Bowen, which uses light touches and periods of rest to discipline the body's response mechanism. A therapist will use fingers and thumbs to perform a series of gentle touches and movements over the patient's body, interspersed with small breaks of several minutes, where the therapist leaves the client to rest. These rest breaks are one of the defining features of the Bowen Technique, and give the body a chance to consider the best response for healing itself.

Due to the hands-on style, people often confuse the concept of Bowen with that of massage, but, unlike massage, the Bowen Technique does not use force, pressure or manipulation. Instead, it stimulates energy flow, promotes circulation, increases mobility, and encourages the body to relax, realign and heal.

What is Bowen?

While the technique will be used to treat a specific problem, it focuses on the body as a whole. This makes it an effective treatment for a variety of ailments, and Bowen practitioners have found a wide range of conditions that respond well to the technique. These include musculoskeletal conditions such as tennis elbow, back pain and whiplash; digestive problems like irritable bowel syndrome, indigestion and constipation; and respiratory problems such as hayfever, bronchitis and asthma.

Bowen therapy has also been used to aid in fertility problems, as experienced by Sharron Strong, 39, a firefighter from Milton Keynes. Having suffered for years with endometriosis, was uncertain of her ability to conceive naturally. After more than one operation to remove the endometriosis, Sharron was eventually considered for a hysterectomy, and she and her partner Harvey began to investigate adoption as their final chance to start a family. It was earlier this year, while attending a yoga class in her village - run by therapist Beryl Whiting - that she first heard about the Bowen Technique.



'[Beryl] mentioned that one of her Bowen patients had just given birth after three failed IVF treatments,' explains Sharron. 'At the time I had never heard of Bowen treatment and immediately after the class I talked to Beryl to learn more.'

What to expect

Most people are recommended to undergo an initial set of three sessions - each of which is usually about 45 minutes. Sharron was recommended three sessions of Bowen therapy over a one-month period, but she admits her first session was not what she had expected: 'I thought I was going to have a full body massage and come out glowing feeling fresh straight from a beauty spa... it's nothing like that.'

During the first session the therapist should establish a comprehensive health profile of the patient, as well as addressing their specific ailment, so initial consultations often include a discussion of the patient's medical history and lifestyle. A typical Bowen session will involve the client lying on a therapy table or bed, (or sometimes the client may sit in a chair), while the therapist performs small movements around the body, usually beginning with the back and legs, working to the upper back and shoulders, and finally, the face and head.

"Beryl explored my medical history, together with my emotional being," says Sharron. "She then quietly worked her way round my body performing very small movements, then left the room for a few minutes, then repeated the treatment.... but I felt that my body had rested. It was strangely calming."

These touches and movements performed in the technique create electrical impulses, which are sent to the nervous system to gently remind the body to regain normal motion and function.

Sharron describes how this worked for her: 'During the third session Beryl said she was going to 'open up' the pelvic region.' She adds, 'Something must have worked because I could hardly walk for three days afterwards, but I fell pregnant during that time. I understand now that the mind and energy in the body have a physical affect on your body.'

Finding a practitioner

Bowen is set to become one of the group of complementary therapies recognised by the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC), the organisation established in 2008 and endorsed by the Department of Health. Registration of Bowen therapists begins on 15 February.

This register will confirm that practitioners have met recognised standards for safe practice. By providing an independent verification of standards, CNHC recognition will allow organisations such


as NHS Trusts, private healthcare providers, individual doctors and other elements of health provision to refer patients, with confidence, to the complementary and natural therapies involved.

While CNHC registration is an important step forward, anyone who is considering having the Bowen Technique in the near future, can access a practitioner through The Bowen Therapists' European Register (BTER). Alongside their Bowen training, practitioners accredited by BTER must hold an Anatomy and Physiology Diploma, have a current First Aid Certificate, Public Liability Insurance and attend regular professional development courses to enhance their skills.

The Complementary Medical Association also advises that any practitioner should, have an agreed code of ethics; be insured in case something goes wrong with your treatment; and be a member of an organization that promotes self-regulation and does not make unreasonable claims about their treatments.

Right for you?

Like any form of treatment, what works for one person may not work for another, and the Bowen Technique may not suit everyone. But unlike conventional therapies, many holistic treatments, like the Bowen Technique, steer away from treating only a specific problem or complaint, and look at treating the body as a whole. This can be a positive method of healing, and the Bowen Technique is a fascinating therapy worth considering: especially if other treatments have not been successful. It is non-invasive and because of this it is suitable for people of all ages - from young babies to the elderly.

Sharron believes the Bowen Technique was the right choice for her. She is now four months pregnant and works in the fire department's office. 'I'm really enjoying my pregnancy thanks to Beryl - and Harvey of course!' she says, adding, 'I wish I could tell the world about this treatment - especially women who have had failed IVF and feel exhausted from trying to conceive. This is a fantastic way to shift energies.' 

Useful contacts:

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Bowen Therapists' European Register

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www.bowentherapists.com

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council

Tel: 0203 178 2199

www.cnhc.org.uk