

The Alexander Technique

- ◆ The Alexander Technique is a way of learning to use your body better by becoming more aware of balance, posture, and movement.
- ◆ It can help reduce the strain and discomfort that are the result of poor posture and co-ordination.
- ◆ The Alexander Technique is based on the principle that we function as a whole and, to make improvements, we need to learn to prevent unnecessary and harmful habits such as tightening muscles and joints and putting too much effort and tension into our posture and movements.

How is this technique taught - what happens during a session?

It requires a series of individual lessons to learn the Alexander Technique. The teacher uses gentle touch and guides the pupil through simple movements such as sitting, standing, and walking, giving the pupil the experience of better use of themselves. Pupils may spend part of the lesson lying on a table experiencing the gentle touch of the teacher. Fifteen to twenty lessons are recommended in order to learn the basic concepts.

What is the evidence?

Not much research has been carried out on the Alexander technique in relation to back pain, but one trial of a multidisciplinary programme for back pain sufferers, including the Alexander Technique, found improvements in pain that lasted up to six months. In a survey of BackCare members, almost four out of ten users felt that it had brought about a long-term improvement in their back condition, making it the most effective of all the treatments reviewed.

What back conditions is it most likely to help?

Almost all, particularly where inappropriate movements or postures put unnecessary strain on muscles.

What back conditions is it least likely to help?

Pain caused by nerve end irritation, such as sciatica; acute phase of problems such as a prolapsed disc.

What back conditions should not be treated with this technique?

None. The Alexander technique is very safe and gentle.

Associations

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Qualifications

The Alexander technique is not a regulated therapy and anyone can call him or herself an Alexander teacher. There are many schools and associations training Alexander teachers and it is advisable to look for a member of an association that has rigorous training requirements. All teachers with the letters MSTAT after their names have completed a three-year training course approved by The Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique. Teachers with PAAT after their names have completed a four-year training course with the Professional Association of Alexander Teachers

Relevant Information

- ◆ BackCare Fact sheets – Pain Management Alternatives, Physical Activity/Exercise
- ◆ BackCare Exercises Sheet
- ◆ BackCare Booklets - Basic Back Care, Managing Back Pain, Active Back Care
- ◆ Other Publications – “Treat your own Back” by Robin Mackenzie, available from BackCare