

Back Pain:

How the Alexander Technique can Help

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The prevalence of back pain

Does back trouble keep you from playing your favorite sport? Does it stop you from bending or swinging your child into the air? Have you lost precious time from work, spent money on medications or undergone surgery, with little or no relief? Have you tirelessly experimented with various therapies to alleviate your back pain?

Back pain can be both frightening and debilitating. Its prevalence is well-documented:

Research studies show that 80% of Americans suffer from lower back pain severe enough to consult a health professional or use drugs to relieve pain or reduce inflammation.

In 1988, lower back problems ranked seventh among reasons for all U.S. hospitalizations.

Backache is the leading cause of worker absenteeism, costing businesses \$30 billion annually in lost time and medical benefit

Addressing the cause, not the symptom

Chronic back pain can be the result of inactivity, injury, emotional stress, flawed body mechanics or compressed posture. It is often treated with chiropractic adjustments, massage, pain relievers, anti-inflammatory drugs or surgery. Though each of these approaches can have a valuable role in recuperation, the Alexander Technique helps you perceive the cause of your back problem, and gets to the heart of it by helping you change your movement style.

If you slump when you sit, you are overworking some muscles and underusing others. This muscular imbalance is evidenced by a collapsed or rigid posture. If you over-arch the back or bend at the waist rather than the hip joint, you are unconsciously compressing spinal vertebrae. Sitting for sustained periods is the most challenging activity for the human spine, and it is how many of us spend our days.

The Alexander Technique is a proven method of self care that reduces pain, increases your mobility and provides long term relief. It gives you an understanding of the body's fundamental design and a way to move that will help you feel better, on your own. You learn it from an Alexander Technique practitioner, a highly-trained professional who can lead you through a one-on-one learning process tailored to your abilities and needs. Your Alexander Technique teacher listens to your symptoms, seeing them in the context of your entire movement pattern. Through keen observation of the body's dynamics in movement, s/he focuses on how you move as you function.

How you can benefit from the Alexander Technique

You can then use the Alexander Technique to move safely and sensibly. Rather than slumping, you can learn to sit upright without strain. The Technique enables you to reduce overuse of the body's surface muscles by engaging the primary control: your body's central support system. Walking, lifting, reaching, climbing stairs, getting out of bed or into a car -- you learn to accomplish all these routine activities, pain-free.

Since study of the Alexander Technique helps you increase sensory awareness, you become more attuned to your body's warning signs of tension and compression. You acquire the capacity to lessen or prevent episodes of pain, enabling you to decrease your dosage of painkillers or anti-inflammatory medications. You demystify your back problem -- you understand where it comes from and how to change it.

The efficacy of such an approach to this common problem is borne out by facts:

Eighty seven percent of back problems are known to be muscular in origin -- meaning they are related to how you move your body.

A survey of back patients revealed that 75% of those who were told they needed surgery recovered successfully without it.

In a 1988 study by the British Holistic Medical Association of those who suffer from chronic pain, they expressed their preference for the Alexander Technique as their favorite approach long-term pain relief.

The Alexander Technique combines well with other elements in a back rehabilitation program. It can help you recuperate from surgery, derive the maximum benefit from your fitness program, help you improve how you do your physical therapy exercises. It also can extend the benefits of osteopathy, chiropractic, massage or acupuncture.

Most importantly, it puts into your hands the capacity to relieve and prevent your back problems. Rather than wondering why you're flat out on the couch after picking up a newspaper, you move through your day with more confidence, grace and ease.

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