

WHY IS THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IN THE NICE GUIDELINES?

Question - Why is the Alexander Technique in the NICE Guidelines?

Answer - Because, unlike physiotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic, Pilates, yoga and supervised exercise, only the Alexander Technique has been shown in a large randomised controlled trial published in a peer-reviewed journal, to provide substantial long-term benefit in chronic low back pain¹. 590 people were studied and had on average 21 days per month in pain. One group had normal GP care (painkillers, physiotherapy, etc) and, at the end of a year they still had 21 days in pain. One group had six sessions of therapeutic massage, which provided the same amount of time and touch; at the end of a year, they had an average of 19 days in pain. Another group was advised to take exercise (half an hour of brisk walking or swimming daily) and at the end of



the year, they had 14 days in pain (this is consistent with other RCTs of supervised exercise in chronic low back pain). Another group was prescribed the exercise after attending 6 Alexander Technique lessons, and, at the end of a year, they had 10 days in pain. The last group attended a full course of 24 individual Alexander lessons, (and half of them were prescribed the exercise). At the end of a year, they had 3 days in pain and those prescribed exercise gained no advantage.^{2,3,4,5}

Not only is there RCT evidence for the efficacy of learning and applying the AT in chronic low back pain, but the AT is also in the NICE guidelines for Parkinson's disease after an RCT showed statistically significant benefits in the performance of the activities of daily living and in depression scores for people on drug treatment for Parkinson's disease^{6,7,8}.

Evidence for Benefit in Other Conditions - How is this Achieved and What is the Relevance for Sports and Exercise Medicine?

It is because learning and applying the AT enhances general functioning that it is so beneficial in back pain, and improves the performance of daily activities in people with Parkinson's disease.

Dr Wohl presents the evidence for prescribing Alexander Technique (AT) lessons in Sports and Exercise Medicine.

Similar enhancements have already been shown in pilot trials for such diverse conditions as performance anxiety and blood pressure lowering in musicians⁹, respiratory function¹⁰, balance¹¹ in elderly people^{12,13,14,15}, knee osteoarthritis¹⁶, neck pain^{17,18}, gait¹⁹, chronic pain^{20,21,22,23}, stuttering²⁴, postural tone^{25,26} and surgeons' posture²⁷.

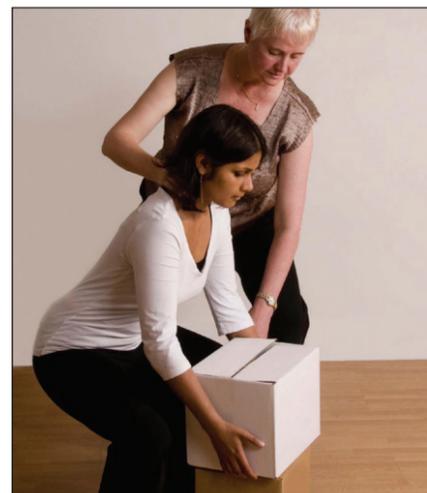
Alternative or Orthodox?

Many so-called "alternative" or "complementary" therapies (as well as, recently, some very popular painkillers) have fallen from favour once properly conducted trials or reviews have shown they are little or no better than placebos (cf paracetamol), but each time the microscope of scientific enquiry has hovered over the AT, the results have been positive, all without any gruesome side effects (cf Ibuprofen). Even Professor Edzard Ernst has nothing bad to say about it! Have a read of the research for yourself at <http://alexandertechnique.co.uk>. Click on "Research".

As a former G.P., nothing I have learned in 33 years of studying the AT is at variance with orthodox medical science. Further research is ongoing, and unpublished results are promising. Watch this space!

Teachers or Therapists?

Like Speech Therapy, the Alexander Technique consists entirely of tuition, but, whereas Speech Therapists name themselves (and the people they work with)



for the results of their tuition, Alexander Technique teachers name themselves and their pupils for the process of their tuition, despite the therapeutic results people experience when they use the Technique. Registered Alexander teachers (who belong to the recognised professional body, The Society of Teachers of The Alexander Technique) (<http://alexandertechnique.co.uk>) undergo a three year full-time training, and members of the Society adhere to a code of conduct and disciplinary procedures modelled on those of the GMC.

Why is AT Not More Widely Prescribed?

In my opinion, this is because doctors don't feel comfortable prescribing something that is outside of their experience. Because AT involves experiential learning, it is notoriously difficult to explain in words. If I try to explain in words the taste of a maracujá, you would find it difficult to imagine, but if I told you that "maracujá" is another word for passion fruit, you might well know. Confucius, he say "he who tastes, knows", but here goes:- The Alexander Technique is a taught self-help method to promote naturally efficient psychophysical functioning by meticulous awareness and control of one's reactions providing re-education of one's proprioceptive and kinaesthetic senses resulting

References

- 1: BMJ 2008;337:a884, Little P, Webley F, et al.
- 2: Randomised controlled trial of Alexander Technique lessons, exercise, and massage (ATEAM) for patients with chronic low back pain - BMJ 2008;337:a884
- 3: The impact of Alexander Technique lessons on chronic mechanical low back pain. Vickers AP, Ledwith F, Gibbons AO.
- 4: Patients' views of receiving lessons in the Alexander technique and an exercise prescription for managing back pain in the ATEAM trial. Fam Pract. 2010 (Apr);27(2):198-204. Epub 2009 Dec 23 Yardley L, Dennison L, Coker R, Webley F, Middleton K, Barnett J, Beattie A, Evans M, Smith P, Little P.
- 5: Participating in and delivering the ATEAM trial (Alexander technique lessons, exercise and massage) interventions for chronic back pain: A qualitative study of professional perspectives. Complement Ther Med. 2010 Jun-Aug;18(3-4):119-27. Epub 2010 Jul 3. Beattie A, Shaw A, Yardley L, Little P, Sharp D.
- 6: Retention of skills learnt in Alexander technique lessons: 28 people with idiopathic Parkinson's disease. C Stallibrass, C Frank, K Wentworth. Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies (2005) 9 150-157.
- 7: Randomized controlled trial of the Alexander Technique for idiopathic Parkinson's Disease. Clinical Rehabilitation 2002; 16: 705-718 Stallibrass C, Sissons P, Chalmers.
- 8: Lighten Up: Scientific postural instructions affect axial rigidity and step initiation in patients with Parkinson's disease. Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair 2015 Feb 9. Pii: 1545968315570323. [Epub ahead of print] Choeng RG, Gurfinkel VS, Kwak E, Warden AC, Horak FB.
- 9: A Study of stress amongst professional musicians. Nielsen M (1994). In: the Alexander Technique: medical and physiological aspects, Chris Stevens (Ed.) STAT books, London.
- 10: Enhanced respiratory muscular function in normal adults after lessons in proprioceptive musculoskeletal education without exercises. Chest 1992 Aug; 102(2):486-90. Austin JH, Ausubel P.
- 11: Prolong weight-shift and altered spinal coordination during sit-to-stand in practitioners of the Alexander Technique. Gait Posture. 2011 Oct;34(4):496-501 Cacciatore TW, Gurfinkel VS, Horak FB, Day BL.
- 12: Effects of Alexander Technique training experience on gait behaviour in older adults. Journal of Body & Movement Therapies 2015;19:473-481 O'Neil M, Anderson D, Allen D, Ross C, Hamel K.
- 13: Can the Alexander Technique improve balance and mobility in older adults with visual impairments? A randomized controlled trial. Clinical Rehabilitation 2015;29:244-60 Gleeson M, Sherrington C, Lo S, Keay L.
- 14: Functional reach improvement in normal older women after Alexander Technique instruction. J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci. 1999 Jan;54(1):M8-11. Dennis RJ.
- 15: Feasibility of group delivery of the Alexander Technique on balance in the community-dwelling elderly: preliminary findings. Activities Adaptation and Aging 2008;32:103-119 Batson G, Barker S.
- 16: Reductions in co-contraction following neuromuscular re-education in people with knee osteoarthritis. BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders 2016;17:372. Preece SJ, Jones RK, Brown CA, Cacciatore TW, Jones AKP.
- 17: Alexander Technique lessons or acupuncture sessions for persons with chronic neck pain: A randomized trial. Annals of Internal Medicine 2015;163:653-62 MacPherson H, Tilbrook H, Richmond S, Woodman J, Ballard K, Atkin K, Bland M, Eldred J, Essex H, Hewitt C, Hopton A, Keding A, Lansdown H, Parrott S, Torgerson D, Wenham A, Watt I.
- 18: Efficacy of the Alexander Technique in treating chronic non-specific neck pain: A randomized controlled trial. Clin Rehabil. 2015 Mar 31. Pii 026921515578699. [Epub ahead of print] Lauche R, Schuth M, Schwickert M, et al.
- 19: Older adult Alexander Technique practitioners walk differently from healthy age-matched controls. Journal of Body & Movement Therapies (2016). In Press Hamel, Ka, Ross C, Schultz B, O'Neill M, Anderson DI.
- 20: Taking charge, choosing a new direction: A service evaluation of Alexander Technique lessons for pain clinic patients (SEAT). Project Report. UWE Bristol, Bristol. 2012 McClean S, Wye L.
- 21: Alexander technique and Supervised Physiotherapy Exercises in back Pain (ASPEN): a four-group randomised feasibility trial. NIHR Journals Library; 2014 October. Little P, Stuart B, Stokes M, Nicholls C, Roberts L, Preece S, Cacciatore T, Brown S, Lewith G, Geraghty A, Yardley L, O'Reilly G, Chalk C, Sharp D, Smith P.
- 22: Multidisciplinary approach to chronic back pain: prognostic elements of the outcome. Clin Exp Rheumatol 1996; 14:281-8. Elkayam O, Ben Itzhak S, Avrahami E, et al.
- 23: Early Experiences of a Multidisciplinary Pain Management Programme. Journal of Interprofessional Care 1988;3:47-56. Fisher K.
- 24: F.M. Alexander technique in the treatment of stuttering - a randomized single-case intervention study with ambulatory monitoring. Psychother Psychosom. 2006;75(3):190-1 Schulte D, Walach H.
- 25: Increased dynamic regulation of postural tone through Alexander Technique training. Human Movement Science 2011 Feb;30(1):74089 Cacciatore TW, Gurfinkel VS, Horak FB, Cordo PJ, Ames KE.
- 26: Improvement in automatic postural coordination following Alexander Technique lessons in a person with low back pain. Phys Ther. 2005 Jun;85(6):565-78 Cacciatore TW, Horak FB, Henry SM.
- 27: The impact of the Alexander Technique on improving posture and surgical ergonomics during minimally invasive surgery: pilot study. J Urol. 2011 Oct;186(4 Suppl):1658-62. Epub 2011 Aug 19 Reddy PP, Reddy TP, Roig-Franco J, Cone L, Sivan B, Defoor WR, Gaitonde K, Noh PH.

"The Alexander Technique has been shown in a large randomised controlled trial published in a peer-reviewed journal, to provide substantial long-term benefit in chronic low back pain¹."



in improved efficiency in performance, whether in the activities of daily living, artistic endeavours or sport and exercise.

"He Who Tastes, Knows"

So, what do Daley Thompson, Linford Christie, Sally Gunnell, and John McEnroe have in common with Miriam Wohl, South Leicestershire's best known amateur ping pong player? They all attest to the fact that when they use the AT, their performance improves.

"You have to get a teacher to show you" - John Cleese

In conclusion, why not ask a local STAT-registered teacher to give you a few lessons? You have only to remove your shoes and your fear of the unknown.

What's the worst that could happen? Dr Wohl is a former GP and one of only 13 medically qualified Alexander Technique teachers in the world. She has been teaching the Alexander Technique for 27 years, and works as a GP Expert Witness in Leics and Lincs.

Readers are welcome to contact Dr Wohl for further information and advice: Email: miriamwohl@hotmail.com. Tel: **0116 2404243**. Mobile: **07890 950087**