

The National Childbirth Trust Magazine

The Bowen Technique: Gentle help for mums and babes

The Bowen Technique is a gentle, non-intrusive, light touch therapy that can give great relief to a wide variety of conditions including many of the aches and pains of pregnancy.

A Bowen treatment consists of a series of gentle rolling-type moves, using thumbs and forefingers, at very precise points on the body, mainly on back, legs and neck and it can be given through light clothing. During the course of a Bowen treatment the practitioner leaves the room at intervals for two or three minutes to allow the patient's body to respond to the gentle stimulation of the moves. The breaks are an important part of Bowen work with adults but they are not normally necessary with children, whose bodies respond quickly to treatment (we have all seen children listless and feverish in the morning, happily playing football by teatime!).

While Bowen is best known for treating back and neck pain, sports injuries, frozen shoulder and even asthma and hayfever, it can be used effectively for a whole range of physical, emotional and stress related conditions from infant colic to bedwetting. It is also a very effective treatment for many of the discomforts, pains and problems experienced during pregnancy. It can bring great relief from the almost inevitable back ache as the baby gets heavier, and can also reduce fluid retention, ease breast tenderness, help with sleep disturbances and prompt the body to maintain a good posture.

The pressures and strains of carrying a baby, especially towards the end of a pregnancy, are considerable and the effect of the Bowen Technique back moves has provided relief from back pain for many a heavily laden lady. One young woman began having back pain in the early stages of her pregnancy and the physiotherapist gave her a strap to wear. This provided a bit of relief at first but she needed to wear it all day and it was getting more and more uncomfortable and cumbersome. About 5 months into her pregnancy, she heard about Bowen. After two treatments, one week apart, she was able to dispense with the strap with no ill effects. She came back for a top-up treatment about six weeks later when she felt a hint of backache and then continued through to the end of her pregnancy without any further problems. Another typical "pregnancy back" was kept at bay in the final three months with a Bowen treatment about every two weeks. Another great benefit of a Bowen treatment is that it is very relaxing.

When the due date had come and gone, a very overdue mother-to-be rang her local Bowen practitioner. She had tried "everything" to get the labour going naturally and nothing had worked so far. She had just a few Bowen moves on her back and sacrum while straddling a chair backwards but that seemed to be enough - she had the baby that night.

Debbie and her family had been having Bowen treatments for 3 or 4 years before she became pregnant with her second child, Amy. Bowen had helped her husband recover from a major illness and Debbie had Bowen at regular intervals throughout her pregnancy and even during labour and delivery. During pregnancy, she found that it helped relieve her nausea, back pain and heartburn and it consistently gave her more energy. Her Bowen practitioner also did some work on Debbie's pelvis, which gently balanced it and this seemed to help during labour. In fact, at one point, Debbie was able to fall asleep for two hours during labour, giving her some much needed rest for the final push, so to speak. After the sleep, her contractions were strong and labour seemed to speed up. It was a quick and efficient labour in comparison to her first labour and all was accomplished without drugs. After the birth, Bowen reset Debbie's pelvis very nicely and she recovered from the childbirth smoothly.

Little Amy experienced her first Bowen moves just after delivery, with a few gentle touches to ease her transition into the world. Since then, she has had Bowen for colic (which Bowen settles quickly and easily in babies, well before the age of 4 months when colic tends to disappear) - and for chest infections. Amy, now just over two, loves coming for Bowen treatments, always arriving with a big smile and she immediately lies down with a look of happy anticipation on her face.

Teresa's experience of Bowen began after a particularly noteworthy delivery of her second son - it even made the local newspapers! She was just one day overdue and had arrived for a regular check up at her doctor's surgery. Suddenly, she began labour and realised that this was it - she delivered her baby in the surgery within the half hour. After such a fast delivery, her back and hips felt painful and crooked. As she was leaving her first Bowen treatment she noted that her back felt much better already and she felt "lighter". During the week, she 'felt things moving' in the pelvis and back as the joints resettled correctly. She was also much calmer and was not getting frantic and cross.

In Bowen circles these stories of great relief are frequent and true. While it is fair to say that Bowen does not work for everyone - there will always be about 20% who do not respond to Bowen - that leaves around 80% who have a positive response - very good odds, indeed.

Janie Godfrey is a fully accredited Bowen Technique therapist practicing in Frome, Somerset and is a full member of the professional Bowen practitioners' organisation, the Bowen Therapists' European Register (B.T.E.R.) For more information or to book an appointment, ring her on: 01373 451 558