

# Bowen Therapy: An Overview

Prathiba Sivakumar<sup>1</sup>, SV Dhinakaran<sup>2</sup>, Sudharshini<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

In Geelong, Victoria, Australia, Thomas A Bowen (1916–1982) developed this technique after serving in the military during World War II. He began to notice that certain physical movements of the body had a particular impact on a person's health. Unlike any other form of therapy or discipline, the Bowen technique was developed by its creator without any prior training. According to him, his work was a "simple gift from God." A system such as the one used today was developed over the course of several years. A government inquiry into alternative health professionals in 1975 confirmed that Bowen was extremely busy in his clinic. A study reporting Bowen's annual patient count of 13,000 was conducted over the course of 27 weeks. That was an amazing number of clients per year considering sessions were only 7 days apart and most people needed as little as two or three sessions.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Lifestyle modification, Physical activity, Self-care management.

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## INTRODUCTION

Bowen involves gentle noninvasive movements that are noninvasive and gentle. Using Bowen, the body is stimulated to heal itself by stimulating the flow of energy. Moving in a positive direction can promote positive energy flow, while moving in a negative direction can restrict the flow.<sup>2</sup> It is important to understand that Bowen is not direct energy work, but a physical approach to directing the flow of energy in the body. The Bowen method promotes healing by restoring balance within the body and is safe and effective in treating conditions. The Bowen techniques also provide long-lasting effects, with many people requiring only two or three sessions to achieve success. Various ailments and conditions have been treated using the technique for over 40 years.<sup>3</sup>

## HISTORY

The World War II veteran Tom Bowen learned how he could relieve suffering by moving the body in certain ways. In Victoria, Australia, Tom Bowen developed "The Bowen Technique" in the 1950s. Bowen called his technique as "Soft Tissue Therapy." Every time he had a spare moment, he would help people, and as word of his technique and effectiveness spread, people began to stop in at his home or come up to him on the streets to request treatment. The clinic Tom Bowen opened eventually became a success. Bowen's success in the Bowen technique has amazed both professionals and laypeople alike, although he has no formal training in health care. The technique of Tom Bowen was simply described as a "gift from God." Tom Bowen saw 13,000 patients per year, according to the 1975 Australian Web Report, the majority of his practice came from the inside of his head rather than from any notes, charts, or manuals. He claimed an 88% success rate.<sup>1,2</sup>

## REVIEW LITERATURE ON BOWEN THERAPY

Carter evaluated 20 client's experience based on predominantly quantitative and qualitative interviews; a study was conducted on the use of the Bowen method to treat frozen shoulder patients for pain, function, and wellbeing. All participants experienced improvement in their daily activities with a very long-standing

<sup>1</sup>Department of Medical Surgical Nursing, Vijaya Health Care Academic Society College of Nursing, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

<sup>2</sup>Department of Nursing, Additional Secretary, TNAI, New Delhi, India

<sup>3</sup>Department of Mental Health Nursing, Vijaya Health Care Academic Society College of Nursing, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

**Corresponding Author:** Prathiba Sivakumar, Department of Medical Surgical Nursing, Vijaya Health Care Academic Society College of Nursing, Hyderabad, Telangana, India, Phone: +91 9444897798, e-mail: 8prathibasivakumar8@gmail.com

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history of frozen shoulder.<sup>4</sup> Marr et al. studied 120 participants who underwent Bowen therapy improved hamstring flexibility after one session.<sup>5</sup> Duncan et al. found that 13 sessions of Bowen therapy increased motor function in participants with chronic stroke.<sup>6</sup> Peeyoosha and Neha studied 15 samples who suffered from acute trapezitis that utilized conventional treatment. Along with Bowen techniques, ultrasound, trapezius stretching, and neck strengthening exercises were provided. Statistically, all outcome measures were significant ( $p = 0.05$ ) and demonstrated improvements for all participants. Patients with acute trapezitis benefit greatly from the Bowen technique in terms of pain reduction, improved range of motion, and reduced neck disability.<sup>7</sup> In the study conducted by Felix et al., 34 participants received two sessions of either Bowen therapy or a fake procedure. After measuring the participants' pain threshold on 10 different body sites, the researchers concluded that Bowen therapy had inconsistent effects on the pain response.<sup>8</sup>

## BOWEN THERAPY

A type of body work and gentle therapy known as Bowen therapy stimulates specific points on the body to bring about change. Most maneuvers involve simply rolling over soft tissues including

muscles, tendons, and ligaments.<sup>9</sup> By applying pressure to the fascia of the muscles, a fine electrical current is produced which releases tension and helps restore balance to your body. Bowen healing works by sending neurological signals to brain through gentle muscle roll movements. The body receives a healing message with each movement, relaxing and restoring proper function as a result.<sup>10,11</sup> A unique aspect of this treatment is that it causes many changes in the body without force or manipulation and thus is safe for babies and the elderly.

## INDICATION

Bowen has proven successful in a wide range of case, from muscle pulls to infertility. Allergies, asthma, breast tenderness, bronchitis, constipation, cough, depression, eczema, fever, fibroids of the breast and uterus, flatulence, headache, hernia, hormonal problems, infertility, irregular milk supply, kidney problems, lower back pain, menopause-related problems, muscle sprains and strains, pelvic-sacral coccyx misalignment, premenstrual syndrome, premenstrual-related lower back pain, headache, respiratory problems, sciatica, sleeping problems, sports injuries, stress, temporomandibular joint disorder, and much more.<sup>12</sup>

## CONTRAINDICATIONS

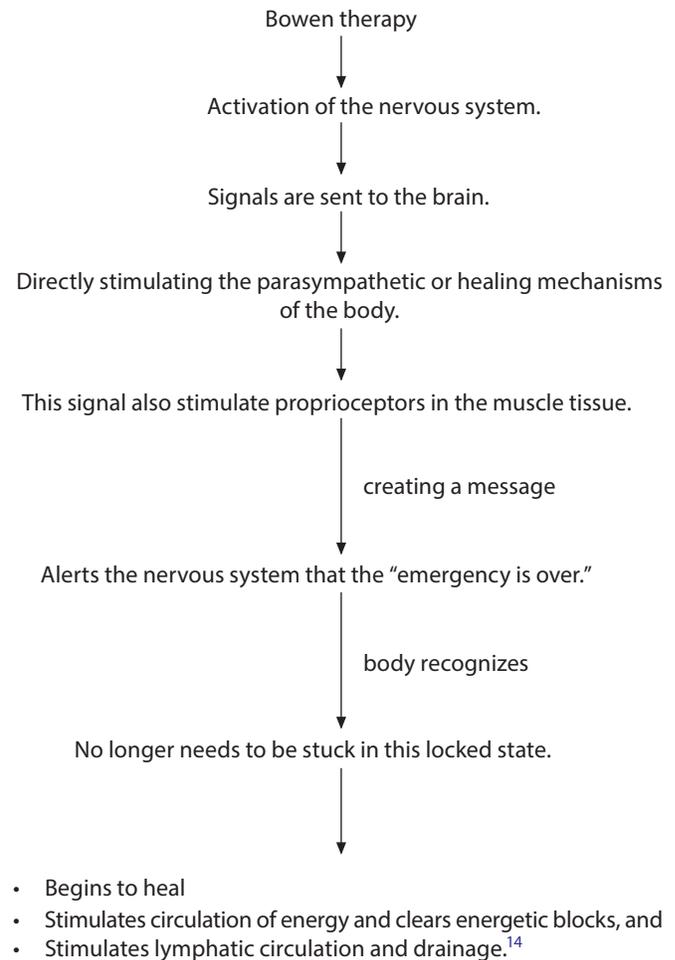
- In order to get the most from Bowen treatment, refrain from massage, cold packs (or any form of extreme temperature application to treatment sites), rubbing, acupuncture, or other healing techniques.
- Coccyx surgery should not be performed on women during pregnancy, since it is thought to induce labor.
- Do not perform Bowen therapy directly on a cancerous tumor.
- People with extensive dental restoration should take this into account before the TMJ procedure.
- The “Breast Tenderness Procedure” is not done on women with breast implants.<sup>13</sup>

## PROCEDURES

A procedure can be done directly on the skin or through clothing.

- An average Bowen technique session lasts between 30 and 60 minutes.
- Normally performed on a bodywork table, but can also be performed seated or using whichever bed is available.
- You may perform moves on bare skin or under light clothing.
- Using the thumb or fingertips, determine which structures are of focus, such as muscles, tendons, or nerve sheaths.
- A gentle push in the opposite direction of the move is then used to release the skin slack.
- By gently pressing in the direction of the move, you will “roll over” the underlying muscle.
- In next step, the skin is shifted across the structure.
- During a Bowen session, only a limited number of complementary moves are performed with frequent pauses between each move.
- There are certain sensations that some patients will experience during the session, including tingling, buzzing, heat, cold, heaviness, or lightness.
- In this case, there is no need to worry—some people are more sensitive than others.

## HOW BOWEN WORKS



## DURATION

Bowen technique is effective for some people right away, while others need a series of three treatments spaced by a week. If you are using the Bowen technique, it is best to avoid other types of bodywork for the duration of the treatment program, such as massage or chiropractic adjustments. Ideally, the Bowen technique should be attempted once every week for three sessions without having received any other treatment between sessions.

## BENEFITS

- Bring a deep balance to the autonomic nervous system
- Increase bioenergy
- Align the body structurally
- Induce a deep relaxation
- Release whole body tension
- Increase focus and concentration
- Improve sleep patterns
- Heighten sensory awareness
- Enhance joint mobility
- Enhance athletic performance.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Physical therapy is only a small part of Bowen's services; it also integrates mind and body, allowing a patient to be pain-free and deeply relaxed, letting the body heal itself. Research on its benefits has been limited, short of being miraculous.<sup>16</sup> Positive results open up the discussion about health issues with the patient. Several studies have linked Bowen therapy to improvements in functional ability and pain relief in various diseases.

Successful result opens the door to further conversations about a patient's health. Bowen therapy was associated with improvements in functional ability of different diseases as well as symptoms reduction. Quantitative and qualitative assessments revealed that Bowen successfully reduced stress and improved energy, wellbeing, and sleep.

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