

— HAVE YOU TRIED —

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE RE-EDUCATES THE MIND AND BODY, HELPING US TO ADDRESS POOR HABITS AND MOVE MORE FREELY

Words: Karen Young

Many complementary therapies, including massage, reflexology and acupuncture, involve sitting or lying back to receive a treatment that is largely controlled by the therapist. By contrast, the Alexander technique takes a more educational and collaborative approach, with the teacher guiding you to move your body mindfully, to help ease tension and restore balance.

The technique was developed by Frederick Matthias Alexander, an Australian actor born in the 1860s whose career was jeopardised by severe voice difficulties on stage. The medical profession was unable to diagnose and resolve the condition, so Alexander started a lengthy process of self-assessment, using three mirrors to observe his behaviour when reciting lines. He discovered that the problem stemmed from imbalances and excess tension in his neck and body, so he started to experiment with new ways to speak and move more freely, which in turn produced other health benefits.

More than 150 years later, many of us continue to adopt poor postural habits, which we repeat over and over on a daily basis, affecting the way we function. “The aim of the Alexander technique is to make us more aware of the way we hold and move our body as we carry out daily activities, so that we can recognise and ‘un-learn’ poor habits and replace these with more helpful ones,” says Daška Hatton, an Alexander technique teacher and member of the FHT. “The real beauty is that once you have learned the technique, you can apply it



to any activity – from driving a car or playing an instrument, to picking up your little one or even pushing a shopping trolley.”

While some teachers offer group introductory courses, the Alexander technique is usually taught on a one-to-one basis. “Simple, everyday movements such as sitting, standing, walking and bending are all explored over a series of lessons,” says Daška. “Your teacher will gently guide you throughout, both verbally and physically, to help you create a new awareness of your body and a more fluid way of moving.”

Many people notice an improvement soon after starting the Alexander technique, but it is important to put into practice what you learn between lessons to see long-term benefits.

Sessions typically last 30 to 45 minutes and cost £30 to £100, depending on the length of treatment, location and teacher.

The Federation of Holistic Therapists (fht.org.uk) is the UK and Ireland’s leading professional association for complementary, holistic beauty and sports therapists. ☺

5 benefits of the Alexander technique

1 The Alexander technique focuses on improving the relationship between the head, neck and spine to relieve tension throughout the whole body. Studies show that a series of lessons can help those affected by chronic back pain and neck pain.

2 Do you have poor coordination? By streamlining the way you move and hold your body, the technique can improve balance and coordination, including in the elderly.

3 Injury can lead to tension as the body tries to compensate for and protect the affected area. Even when an injury has resolved itself, this tension can persist, as it has become a ‘learned’ habit. The Alexander technique can help to re-educate the body and relieve this tension.

4 Some evidence suggests that the technique can help people whose abilities are affected by Parkinson’s disease.

5 It has been suggested that respiratory function and stuttering may improve after the Alexander technique.

BEFORE YOU GO

The Alexander technique should only be used alongside standard medical care and not as an alternative. Consult your GP or other health professional for medical attention and advice.