

on your feet:

Julie Ferry looks at the Alexander Technique, an alternative method to coping with pain, stress and tension.

IN THE BALANCE



CHRONIC PAIN. According to a recent survey, it's something that one in eight people will suffer at some point during their life (Pain in Europe Survey, 2003). With a good proportion of your time spent at work, it is important that you are not working in a way that may cause this debilitating condition. With our increasingly busy lives, it can stop us in our tracks, which is not an option for some of us who are continually trying to juggle many things at once. More and more you must be aware of your workspace, your posture and anything else that you can do to ensure that you protect your body whilst carrying out everyday duties. That is where the Alexander Technique may be able to help you.

What is it?

The Alexander Technique addresses the causes of pain, stress and tension by concentrating on the body's natural balance and co-ordination. Alexander Technique practi-

tioners claim that by paying attention to this balance, you can improve not only your overall coordination, but also other functions that we take for granted, such as breathing, posture, freedom of the joints, staying calm under pressure, and maintaining good overall health.

How does it work?

The Alexander Technique examines the way people carry themselves, move and hold tension and from this assessment practitioners determine the underlying cause of the pain or problem. A qualified teacher uses explanation and a guiding touch to help you rediscover the balance within yourself. Starting by working with simple movements and positions, such as sitting, walking, or bending the knees, you learn how your coordination works, how you create tension and how you can prevent or release it. It is claimed that this awareness helps you to discard bad habits and function more efficiently.

Sarah Bartlett, a Practice Manager from Angle House Orthodontics based in Edgware, had first hand experience of the Alexander Technique when her practice organised an in-house course.

'It was about two years ago that we had a six week course on the Alexander Technique,' says Sarah. 'A teacher would come into the practice on a Tuesday afternoon. It was really helpful for all of us and I still use the techniques that we were taught now. It was mainly things like how to position yourself at your desk and general posture. It is about giving yourself personal time. Then I was suffering from migraines and the exercises really helped me. It was lovely for our boss to organise it for us. It felt like a real luxury!'

Stephanie Smith, a qualified teacher and member of the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique Council, agrees that it can be particularly helpful for the dental team.

'Performing dental procedures requires a combination of delicate use of hands, repetitive movement and sheer strength and power, all of which are performed routinely with excess muscular tension. This can lead the dental professional to suffer physical problems and chronic pain. The Alexander Technique is a unique, practical, self-help method that is non-invasive, non-manipulative and empowering. It gives you a tool that helps you understand and resolve the root cause of pain and tension.'

The Alexander technique may help you improve your posture and provide a new way of coping with stress and pain or be used as an aid for rehabilitation after an injury or illness. The Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique can provide further information along with a list of UK teachers and courses running across the country.

on your feet

Therapeutic Thermals

Bath has been associated with rejuvenation and relaxation since Roman times. With the opening of the Thermae Bath Spa just around the corner, the tradition is set to continue, reports **Kate Maynard.**

WHAT BETTER way to escape the daily grind of your nine to five than to pay a visit to a luxury spa? The ideal treat for a spot of pampering, relaxation and rejuvenation, health spas and farms can be found all over the UK and abroad. However the Thermae Bath Spa in Bath is the only natural thermal spa in Britain.

With an opening date planned for mid-2004, this spa complex has involved renovation of historical buildings and baths dating back to the 18th century. Indoor and outdoor pools will be filled with water that has been cooled from springs that rise daily at 44 degrees centigrade. In the outdoor pool, situated on the roof of the spa building, bathers will be able to lie back in the soothing water with Bath's city skyline before them, and the rolling green countryside beyond.

If you manage to haul yourself from the thermal pools, there will be plenty more on

offer, according to Fiona Humphreys, Sales and Marketing Executive at the Spa. The complex includes a steam room to cleanse your urban skin, as well as a range of treatments, such as the exotic-sounding Moroccan Mud Wrap and Aromatherapy Salt Glow - treatments with both healing and relaxation properties. When you're feeling sufficiently chilled and pampered, you could call into the solarium, have a wander on the terrace, learn more about the spa in the visitor centre, or visit the on-site restaurant. With no membership required, you can spend as little or as long time as you like at this spa, with prices starting from £19 for a two-hour session, and a range of accommodation nearby to suit your wallet.

More information on this natural thermal spa experience can be found at www.thermaebathspa.com. Look out for our special spa offer for dental team members in a future issue of *Vital*.



This little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed at home... do you remember that?

I would chuckle with glee as that last little piggy went wee wee wee... but somehow I don't think I'd be quite so delighted today if someone were to take hold of one of my toes and gave it a wiggle. That's not just because I'd be raising concerns of personal space, but as much because I would need at least three weeks' notice to get my feet into any kind of state that I'd be happy for anyone to take more than a passing glance at!

Okay... I put my hand up to almost total neglect of anything below my knees between the months of October and May, but I'm sure I'm not alone, and looking after your feet is even more important if you have a job where you are standing up most of the time. So I decided to investigate what it is we should be doing to keep our feet fit and healthy, and ready, at a moment's notice, for a pair of strappy slingbacks or a game of 'this little piggy'.

'The most common piece of advice we give to patients', says chiropodist Junaid Ahmed, 'is about nails and how to cut them. It is important to keep them healthy to avoid fungal infections and ingrowing nails. The best thing is to cut them straight across; and rubbing tea tree oil into them keeps them strong and in a healthy condition.'


A common ailment for people who are on their feet all day is athlete's foot, so to help prevent this, Junaid recommends drying thoroughly between the toes after washing. This fungi likes damp conditions, which is a bit of a problem if you have sweaty feet. But don't worry, Junaid has a suggestion for this too: 'bathing the feet in warm water with either drops of tea tree oil, or salt every day for two to three weeks usually helps'.

Daily routine

To help keep your feet healthy, a daily routine is a good idea and the following steps are recommended by the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists:

- Wash feet daily in warm soapy water and dry thoroughly particularly between the toes
- Apply moisturising cream all over the foot (avoiding between the toes), especially in if the skin is dry. This will help to avoid cracked heels
- Apply a light covering of powder
- Use a pumice stone gently over hard skin but not on skin over a bony area or joint
- Regularly trim toe nails using nail clippers. Cut straight across to avoid in-growing toe nails
- Keep feet warm. Regular exercise helps to keep circulation healthy.

Fit feet



After years of neglect, Naomi Davis decides it's time to pay some attention to her long-suffering feet.

'Another area to watch out for is the heels'. If the skin gets very hard and dry they can become cracked and painful. Junaid goes to great lengths to point out that every day we moisturise our face and hands with special creams, and yet our feet, which are put under more stress than any other part of our bodies and dry out the most quickly, are given far less attention. 'Putting cream on the feet is a good idea, particularly if the skin is dry. For very bad heels a good idea is to, before going to bed, put cream on the feet, wrap them in clingfilm and then put on a thin pair of socks and leave on over night.'

For people who are on their feet for most of the day, it's a good idea not to stand still for too long, to try and keep the circulation going, stretch the legs, walk around and do a

few exercises. Try going on to tiptoes a few times and flexing the feet.

Before we know it sandals season will be upon us again so I think it's time for me to put my neglectful habits behind me. If I follow this advice I might even be ready for a game of this little piggy...

Wear the right shoes

Always wear the right shoes for the job. Suitable shoes can protect against spillage, irritants and other substances. (BDA Advice Sheet, A3)

- Wear well-fitting, comfortable shoes
- Go for flexible soles, which should be flat except for a gentle slope up towards the toes
- Fastenings needs to hold the foot in place and stop the toes from sliding. There should be enough room at the top for the toes to move freely
- The lining of the shoe should be smooth, free from seams, wrinkles, rough or obstrusive stitching
- The heel carries a large proportion of the body weight, so the heel of the shoe should have a broad base and be up to 4cm high
- The upper of a shoe should ideally be made of natural materials eg leather.