The Little Bowen Book
To Pierre Saine, my precious colleague, thanks for your dedicated support; to my students, thanks for all that I learn each and every day; and to Gaston Germain, thanks for planting the seed in my soul for this book.
The Little Bowen Book

for a great manual therapy

Louise Tremblay
It is strongly recommended that you consult with your doctor before practicing these techniques, especially if you are currently under medical care or suffer from ailments. The author is not liable for any injuries or other health-related problems resulting from the use of the therapeutic methods or the advice described in this book.

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Technical revision: Jennie Anstey and Lisa Samet

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In this fast-paced, busy world, the opportunity for true and deep relaxation is extremely rare. Our senses are forever inundated with a barrage of information. Various forms of external provocation, such as noise, crowds, pollution, electronic media, as well as the full array of psychological and emotional stresses, enter our personal and professional lives and keep our sympathetic nervous system in a high state of alert. We cannot easily relax.

With the help of the Bowen technique, we can better understand our body’s language. These manual movements by a therapist activate the parasympathetic nervous system and allow our body to detect the stresses and release the tension. The body can then gradually recognize and restore its self-regula-
ting functions which, in turn, stabilizes its metabolism and neuromuscular functions. The Bowen technique is a hands-on, holistic method which consists of very gentle challenges to the muscles and soft tissues; it produces astonishing results, considering the delicateness of the care from the therapist. Our slogan, “Less is more”, perfectly defines this technique.

I will begin by describing the origins of the Bowen technique, and then present my theories on how it works. The basic procedures are also outlined so that readers may better understand what happens in a typical session with a Bowen therapist.

My goal in writing this book is to spread the message about this wonderful technique and to elaborate on how it works for the benefit of both therapists and clients throughout the world.
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Bowen technique is a manual, therapeutic method available to health therapists from diverse schools of training — medical doctors, osteopaths, physiotherapists, chiropractors, massage therapists, nurses, psychologists, acupuncturists, homeopaths and naturopaths. In short, all therapists in the field of healthcare, whether traditional or alternative.

To better learn and practice the Bowen technique, it is required that all Bowen practitioners have a basic understanding in anatomy and physiology. Although this book was not written for purposes of “self-learning,” but rather as a complement to existing courses, it will help everyone become acquainted with this technique of well-being and enable them to better understand how a Bowen session proceeds.
how to use this book

Throughout this book, I use current scientific terminology that may seem a bit difficult for the uninitiated. If such is your case, take time to read the passages slowly. You will learn more than you expect. Knowledge is accessible to all; you need only stop and let it seep in through your senses. Keep an open mind and explore. Don’t worry, there is no exam at the end!

To therapists, whether you are practicing the Bowen method or not, I offer you food for thought. The theories outlined are still only theories. I do not claim to have found all the explanations. We must work together to advance hypotheses and make attempts to understand what is going on. I offer you my current perceptions. I look forward to hearing yours.
Chapter 1

Origin and Philosophy

Tom Bowen was inspired by the principle that the body has the ability to “self-regulate.” To him, the ideal therapeutic technique was one that would stimulate the system to rebalance the malfunctions resulting from tissue disruption. He incorporated the underlying principles that structure governs function and that everything is interconnected. Therefore, the disruption of any one tissue disrupts the function of the entire system.
Mr. Bowen set out to restore the structural integrity of the body in a way that would allow for the optimal performance of the organism. He also believed in the existence of vital energy (or Chi). According to traditional Chinese medicine, this energy must flow freely throughout the entire body to ensure good health. Tom Bowen’s genius resided in his discovery of a system of “moves” or procedures which re-establishes the natural flow of this vital energy.
Thomas Ambrose Bowen was born in Australia in 1916. He married Jessie McLean in 1941. In the early 50’s, he noticed that his wife’s asthma attacks, which often required hospitalization, varied significantly in accordance with her nutrition. After years of a sound diet, and the soft tissue manipulations which he had perfected over time to alleviate her suffering, Jessie no longer needed drugs or hospitalization. During this period, he met with Ernie Saunders, a renowned manual therapist. This collaboration marked a turning point in his life. Over the course of his numerous meetings with Saunders, Bowen developed treatment techniques that would later bear his name. Self-taught, Bowen studied anatomy and, step by step, experimented constantly; he developed a unique method that allowed him to treat colleagues suffering from severe
back pain. In the late 50’s, faced with a growing demand for his treatments, Tom Bowen decided to open a clinic where he worked evenings. He later quit his day job to devote himself entirely to his new profession.

He first adopted the title of osteopath, as he believed that this was, in fact, what he was doing. Later, when that designation became reserved to those who had completed a specified training program, he elected to describe himself as a “manual therapist.” As his reputation grew, he drew the attention of many health-care professionals interested in this new method. Amongst these observers were a massage therapist, Oswald Rentsch, four chiropractors, Keith Davis, Nigel Love, Kevin Neave and Romney Smeeton, and an osteopath, Kevin Ryan.
Origin and Philosophy

THE IDEAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

In order to maximize the benefits of the Bowen treatment, it is imperative to respect certain working guidelines. The following suggestions describe an appropriate work environment for the Bowen practitioners.

External Influences
Calmness of the surroundings is of utmost consideration. Outside influences, such as background noise, music (even the softest), the scent of incense or of essential oils, are all elements that lessen the effects of the treatment. The nervous system of the client should not have to deal with these external stimulations. During the Bowen treatment, the therapist does not usually speak with the client. The client, however, is encouraged to express what he feels during the course of the session, as his reactions can have a determining
influence on what is to follow. It is recommended that
the therapist leave the room between each sequence
of moves in order to enable the client to peacefully
feel the profound effects of the treatment during these
pauses. If it is not possible for the therapist to leave,
she may remain in the room but should distance her-
self from the massage table.

**Ambient Work Environment**

The treatment room ambiance should be warm, in-
viting and conducive to relaxation. The notion of
warmth is all important. The client should be cove-
red and made to feel secure. In warm weather a light
sheet can be used as a drape, while in cooler weather
a flannel covering is appropriate.
The Massage Table
Most therapists prefer to work with a massage table over which a new, clean sheet is spread for each client. The table should be comfortable and of a width that allows the client’s arms to rest along the length of his body. A massage table with an electric elevation system can be used by professionals with a large clientele. A head-rest may be appropriate if the client finds lying face down with their head turned to the side too uncomfortable to relax. Therapists are encouraged to use as many pillows and/or cushions as needed to ensure the client’s comfort during the session. When it is impossible for a client to comfortably assume a face down position, the method can also be given effectively to clients in a seated or, at times, standing position.
the ideal work environment

Appropriate Clothing
The Bowen technique is best practiced by direct contact to the skin. However, experienced practitioners can just as easily work through light, loose-fitting clothing. If clients choose to remain clothed, it is clearly preferable that they wear comfortable clothing rather than tight-fitting jeans or leggings.

Optimizing the Effects
As practitioners, we must remember at all times that our goal is to stimulate the nervous system to move from the sympathetic mode to the parasympathetic mode, which can only be achieved if the client feels enveloped in calm surroundings with warmth, comfort and serenity. When this is achieved, they can relax, and the setting is suitable for the Bowen procedures to be given with maximum efficiency. The therapist is responsible for creating this feeling of security.
Origin and Philosophy

**A Typical Bowen Session**

The Bowen technique stimulates the nervous system and allows it to self-regulate.

**The Interview**

Even though Bowen practitioners are not authorized to provide diagnoses, they will nevertheless inquire about their client’s state of general health and take note of their medical history, as well as the reasons for the treatment session. When in doubt, the therapist will suggest that the client consults with a medical doctor for an evaluation of their state of health.

**The Session Itself**

A Bowen session consists of a series of specific “moves” (see “The Bowen move”) practiced on specific areas of the body. The pauses between each series of
moves are frequent and important; these pauses afford the body time to fully respond to the moves. When practiced individually, the moves can produce benefits, but a series of complementary moves maximizes the results. With the client lying face down, the therapist begins to work on the client’s lumbar region and then proceeds to work on the back of their legs. She will continue performing moves on the dorsal region, then in the area of the shoulder blades. The client will then turn over, and the therapist will perform moves on the neck muscles. Depending on the nature of the client’s ailment, the therapist will then concentrate on more specific areas of the body, all the while mindful of the alternation between “moves” and “pauses.”
Origin and Philosophy

Each treatment session lasts between 45 to 90 minutes and requires only a limited number of procedures. Moreover, the Bowen technique is simple to perform and gentle on the client.

**After the Session**

Following the therapy, for reasons explained later in this book, clients are encouraged to rest, walk, drink more water, to not apply ice or heat to sore muscles, to avoid strenuous exercise, warm baths or spas (hot-tubs) and to postpone for a week all other forms of physical therapy and heavy exercise. Specific, gentle stretching exercises may be recommended. If clients adhere to this protocol, the deep relaxation induced by the Bowen “moves” can be felt for as long as four or five days and the increased muscular mobility can last even longer.
The Bowen technique is beneficial to everyone. It contributes to overall good health. And it is preventive, as it allows the central nervous system to remain longer in the parasympathetic mode and thereby enables the body to “detect” imbalances, often asymptomatic, and to reactivate functions before an illness takes hold. This technique most commonly affects such functions as respiration, digestion, sleep, circulation, as well as arterial pressure and pulse, lymphatic circulation, and the endocrine and immune systems. There is no need to wait until one is ill to receive Bowen technique treatments.
The Bowen technique, however, has proven a very effective tool against certain ailments. It does not aim to “treat” specific conditions, but rather to stimulate the human body to activate its own healing mechanisms.

As mentioned earlier, in no instances are Bowen therapists authorized to provide diagnoses; clients must consult their doctor to have their condition evaluated. The Bowen therapists should never interfere with prescribed medical treatments.

The following list is drawn from statements made by Bowen clients who have found relief from their ailments as diagnosed by medical doctors.
Origin and Philosophy

- Faster recovery from illness, operation or injury (whether recent or in the past).
- Acute or chronic musculoskeletal disorders, whether post traumatic, post surgical or arthritic, with loss of mobility and/or muscular spasms.
- Sports injuries: ankles; knees; sprains; muscle strains; tennis elbow.
- Pelvic problems: hip pain; leg length discrepancy; tension in pelvic muscles.
- Shoulder problems: pain in the shoulders or upper limbs; numbness in the arms or hands; frozen shoulder; repetitive strain injuries.
- Neck problems: stiffness in or restricted mobility of the neck; resulting from an accident or poor posture.
benefits of the Bowen technique

• Pain in the coccyx, resulting from a fall or childbirth.
• Headaches and/or migraines, resulting from stress, tension, poor posture or digestion.
• Pain or tension in the jaws.
• Sciatic problems, whether recent or long lasting.
• Chronic fatigue syndrome and/or fibromyalgia.
• Menstrual pains: irregular cycle; pre-menstrual syndrome; menopause and hot flashes.
• Carpal tunnel syndrome.
• Digestive problems: constipation; diarrhoea, bloating.
• Respiratory problems: asthma; hay fever, colds; flu; sinus congestion.
• Kidney malfunctions: water retention; kidney stones; reduced renal activity.
Contraindications

With the accumulated experience of thousands of therapists, not to mention Tom Bowen himself, who treated an impressive number of clients in his clinic, we can vouch that this technique is safe for people of all ages, including the very young, older people, the disabled and, of course, athletes.

There are no contraindications to this therapy, except in very serious cases that are beyond our capabilities and which need to be referred to medical doctors. Such conditions include severe infections, high fevers, fractures, major injuries, hemorrhages, serious skin conditions, contagious illnesses, acute respiratory problems, non-diagnosed chest, cervical or abdominal pains, and all other medical emergencies.
Many hypotheses attempt to explain the stunning results of the Bowen “moves.” One can compare this modality to the actions of a musician who, by plucking a guitar string at the right place and with appropriate force, produces a vibration that amplifies and resonates throughout the entire instrument. Some say the vibrational waves produced by the therapist’s actions spread to the entire body by way of energy meridians; others say the action travels through the fascia. Therapists need to pause for a few minutes between moves to allow these energy vibrations to reach their full effect.
Another interpretation suggests that the benefits are derived from the stimulation of certain proprioceptors, such as neuromuscular spindles, Golgi tendon organs or joint kinesthetic receptors. The stimulation of these neurological elements, located in muscular or tendinous tissues, represents the starting point of sensory information sent to the central nervous system in the body’s attempt to rebalance itself and revert to its original image. This theory is not supported by any scientific proof, however it seems to meet the criteria of how the body heals in a Bowen session.
How Bowen Works

THE BOWEN MOVE

The Bowen move is, in itself, well refined. The therapist determines with her thumb or fingers the structure in need of treatment — for example, a muscle, tendon or nerve sheath. The covering skin has a bit of give, which is challenged by applying light traction in the opposite direction of the anticipated move. The muscle is then stimulated by applying a slight transversal pressure in the same direction as the anticipated move. The “move” ends with the mobilization of the skin covering the structure in question.

Various Bowen Moves
As stated above, some Bowen “moves” can be compared to a vibration-like sensation similar to that of a tightly-strung guitar string when plucked. Other moves, especially those performed on areas where the skin is
thin and delicate, are lighter and barely noticeable. The challenge is more sustained in areas where the tendons are large and stout. In some instances, simple application of pressure on certain points is sufficient to obtain the desired results. The Bowen technique may appear simple at first glance, but it demands great dexterity, focus, adaptability and precision from its practitioners.

**What the Client Feels**

Clients frequently mention feeling a warm, tingling sensation. Almost all report an effect of profound relaxation, as the session moves along. Some go so far as to actually fall asleep, conveniently allowing the autonomic nervous system to fully function. When the practitioner works according to the professional rules, few, if any, clients claim to have felt nothing at all during a Bowen session or shortly thereafter.
Let us now take a look at two aspects of the energy theory: first the Chi; then the fascia.

**The Chi**

Tom Bowen believed in the universal energy called Chi. This energy circulates on the surface and within the body along interconnected channels and was identified centuries ago in Chinese medicine. These fourteen channels, called meridians, contain access portals called acupuncture points, which influence internal organs and their functions. Most moves of the Bowen technique are practiced on particular meridians and some on specific acupuncture points. Within each Bowen move, the Chi contained along that meridian is stimulated. According to Chinese medicine, the free circulation of Chi throu-
energy theories

ghout the human body is essential to good health. It is not known whether Tom Bowen had sufficient knowledge of Chinese medicine on which he based his procedures. Nonetheless, acupuncturists practicing the Bowen method unanimously claim that the Chi is modified during and after each Bowen treatment.

The Fascia
Anatomically speaking, the word “fascia” denotes connective membrane tissue. We prefer to consider the definition for fascia as described by osteopaths, that is, fascia is a widespread, interconnected and continuous, membranous network. This understanding about connective tissue reinforces the basic principle that the slightest pressure, whether active or passive, will be transferred along the entire structure. All anatomical tissues can therefore be considered as interdependent.
The fascia is a connective tissue that has the same basic composition as all other connective tissue. It is composed of connective tissue cells which synthesize two proteins (collagen and elastine fibres) and of the extracellular matrix which is the free space between the cells. It is also called the “ground substance.” The ground substance contains fluid, proteins (the proteoglycans) and large molecules (the glycosaminoglycans), which among other functions attracts and retains water. The ground substance occupies the space between the cells and binds the fibres. Changes in the viscosity of the ground substance helps retain water in the extracellular spaces, prevents the dissemination of infections, and influences cellular metabolic activity. This interstitial fluid plays an essential role; it is the hub of intense metabolic activity. Amongst its many components, it contains nutrients and macrophages, thereby giving it a place of vital
importance in cellular nutrition and metabolic waste elimination.
This fluid permeates the tissues and travels in the extracellular spaces by “effusion.” Due to the mobility of the tissues sliding one against each other it spreads like an oil stain.
We can say that all connective tissues are more or less densified fascia. In loose connective tissue, there are fewer fibres and a greater quantity of interstitial fluid. It is a highly metabolic tissue, as it contains many nutrients and macrophages. In dense connective tissue, there are more fibers and less fluid; it is a mechanical tissue.
The aponeurosis, tendons, joint capsules and ligaments are all part of the same mechanical network called the fascia.
All this connective tissue, or fascia, must be kept sufficiently hydrated to ensure the optimum performance
of its major functions. There functions include the following:

- Circulation of fluids.
- Physical barrier to the entry of microorganisms into the body.
- Structural support (the fascia envelops and protects each organ).
- Defensive role by mediating inflammation, enhancing immunity, and attending to wound repair.

For the body to function well, it is essential that this “colloidal gel” not be too viscous. Thixotropy is a characteristic of the ground substance, that is to say, after an energy input, the colloidal gel turns to colloidal fluid to facilitate metabolic exchanges and electrical conduction. If the gel is too viscous, there will not be as much metabolic exchange.
All types of energy, including caloric, chemical, electric, and electromagnetic have the capacity to liquefy the colloidal gel. However, it seems that mechanical energy has the ability to liquefy this colloidal gel five times faster.

The Bowen therapist, by way of gentle but firm pressure applied transversely on the fascial sheath of muscles, tendons or ligaments, influences the hydration of the fascia in this given area. We could assume that, as the fascia is continuous, this mechanical energy is transferred to the entire fascia through the collagen fibers which have strong electrical conductivity properties.
**Neuromuscular Theory**

Proprioception is the awareness of movement derived from muscular contraction, tension of the tendons, position of the joints and position of the head in relation to the ground. Receptors of proprioception are called proprioceptors. They can be found in skeletal muscles, tendons, joints, ligaments and in the connective tissue covering bones and muscles. The brain receives a constant flow of nerve impulses indicating the position of various parts of the body. It then makes the necessary adjustments to ensure coordination. We will explain three types of proprioceptors:

- neuromuscular spindles, which are found in skeletal muscles;
- Golgi tendon organs found in tendons near these junction with the muscles;
- joint kinesthetic receptors found in the joint capsules of synovial joints.
In spite of the lack of scientific proof on this matter, it is nonetheless plausible to consider that the Bowen moves act directly upon the nervous system via these proprioceptors, especially certain mechanoreceptors.

**Neuromuscular Spindles**

Neuromuscular spindles detect length variations of the skeletal muscles. This information is transmitted to the cerebellum, where it is processed to improve the coordination of muscular contractions, and to the cerebral cortex, to which it communicates the position and orientation of the limbs.

With each Bowen move, the perpendicular challenge is applied slowly and softly to the belly of the muscle, and it stimulates these neuromuscular spindles just enough to have them transmit nervous impulses to the cerebellum and cerebral cortex, but not to the extent that the muscle itself is contracted. If one muscle is
How Bowen Works

too intensely stimulated, an opposing reflex action is launched to resist this stretching by contracting this muscle and by inducing the relaxation of the antagonist or opposing muscle. It is, however, possible that a firm, but not hard, perpendicular challenge of a muscle will cause the relaxation of the opposing muscle, but not the contraction of the targeted muscle. This may well explain the relaxation effect of the Bowen move when applied to the muscle belly.

Golgi Tendon Organs
The Golgi tendon organs are proprioceptors built into the tendon, near its connection with the skeletal muscle. When a tendon is challenged, Golgi tendon organs produce a nerve impulse that relays a message to the central nervous system informing it of the change in muscular tension. By launching this tendinous reflex, Golgi tendon organs protect the muscles and tendons
against excessive pressure that could otherwise cause injury. Tendinous reflexes trigger the relaxation of the muscle and a lessening of muscular tension.

Certain Bowen moves are practiced on the tendon itself. Given that adaptation by Golgi tendon organs is a slow process, to succeed in activating these cells the therapist must maintain pressure on the tendon for many seconds.
Joint Kinesthetic Receptors

There are many types of joint kinesthetic receptors in and around the joint capsules of synovial joints, such as the knee.

The Ruffini corpuscles, for example, are found in the dermis and inside the joint capsules and are incorporated into the ligaments. These deep receptors react to pressure and to the stretching of the skin.

Pacini corpuscles are found in the connective tissue adjacent to the joint capsules, as well as in the dermis and subcutaneous tissues. These deep receptors react intensely to vibration. They also react to intense pressure but only at the first application of such a strong pressure and finally they react to the acceleration and deceleration of joint movements.
Joint ligaments contain receptors that regulate reflex inhibition of adjacent muscles when these joints come under excessive strain.

Many Bowen moves are performed near small joints, such as the wrists and ankles. The joint kinesthetic receptors in these areas will become triggered during the course of these moves. The Bowen technique does not use any forceful manipulations, although it does, at times, require movement of the limbs, arms or hands in order to activate these joint kinesthetic receptors.
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The Pause

While the challenge on a muscle, with its appropriate duration and intensity, is essential in obtaining positive results, the “pause” separating the various series of moves is equally important. This pause is the key to the Bowen technique. No other hands-on therapy integrates similar moments of silence that allow the nervous system to react to these stimulations. The impulse created by the move must be perceived and reacted to by the central nervous system during this rest period. This feedback process must not be interrupted until after the initial stimulation has been perceived and the message assimilated.

To ensure the cerebral cortex remains in a waking state, the Ascending Reticular Activating System (ARAS) of the brain relays a continuous flow of nerve impul-
ses directed to the cerebral cortex. This flow originates from ascending pathways and reaches the neurons of the ARAS, keeping them active and enhancing their excitability effect on the somatosensory cortex and cerebral cortex. By minimising stimulations from the outside environment (e.g. noise, speech, light, odours, touch, music, etc.), we diminish this excitability effect of these sensory stimulations.

The ARAS also seems to act as a filter for this rush of sensory data. It weakens signals that are repetitive, familiar or feeble, and thereby allows uncommon, important or intense signals to reach consciousness. The ARAS and the cerebral cortex seem to ignore 99% of the overall sensory stimuli registered by our receptors. For example, if you are walking down the street, it is likely that your brain will first register the noise of a car approaching from behind, rather than the colour
How Bowen Works

of the shirt worn by a person walking nearby. This filter serves to prioritize incoming data.

Bowen moves are, for the most part, very gentle and very subtle. If we did not take time to separate them from all other external stimuli, they would be lost amongst the host of other incoming data. Thus in a quiet, uninterrupted setting, the Bowen moves are better able to be perceived; they are more likely to pass through the ARAS filter for registration by the cerebral cortex.

Each pause must last at least two minutes. Clients will often feel a warm, tingling sensation, as mentioned earlier, within the first minute after the move has been made. The pause may be extended for as long as the client experiences these sensations. These sensations are a sign that the nervous system is active.
Possible Reactions

Detoxification occurs quite often after the first Bowen session. These symptoms range from light headaches to stiffness or sudden fatigue. This same reaction can take place after a massage or an osteopathic treatment. These temporary symptoms indicate that the body is eliminating toxins; these effects can be felt up to 24 or 48 hours after a treatment session. In such instances, it is recommended to drink more water and to go for walks to help eliminate metabolic waste. This reaction is rarely felt after the second or subsequent sessions, although continued drinking of water and light walking are still encouraged. The positive effects of the Bowen treatment can be felt immediately after the first session, or they may take up to four to five days before appearing. On rare occasions, it is only after two or three weeks that the person may notice a change.
Recommendations after a Bowen Treatment

• Do not remain seated for more than half an hour at a time at home, work or in the car.
• Get up and walk a few steps. Walking helps the body detoxify. This is particularly important for clients suffering from lower back pain.
• Walking also helps stimulate the blood and the lymphatic circulation.
• Drink more water for several days following each treatment.
• Wait at least five days before receiving any other type of bodywork treatment. Each Bowen treatment may take up to ten days to complete its action.
• Do not apply ice or heat on the days following a treatment session.
• Avoid heavy physical exertion for a few days.
Before describing the basic moves of the Bowen technique, it is important to review the benefits of the treatment session itself. In addition to enjoying profound relaxation, those who undergo this treatment experience deep and beneficial effects that manifest as much in the quality of sleep as in the stabilization of the musculoskeletal, digestive and endocrine systems. A single session can provide a sense of profound well-being, although generally a series of sessions may be needed to obtain comprehensive and long-lasting results.
Relief from chronic ailments may require regular sessions over an extended period of time. During each subsequent session the therapist will repeat the basic moves, and add one or two procedures specific to the needs of the client. The basic moves are essential to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system and thereby allowing the person to relax completely. The specific procedures were designed by Mr. Bowen to target particular areas. The professional skills of the therapist enhance the success of the treatment.
The Role of the Therapist

Because of the unique and subtle characteristics of the Bowen technique, the practitioner must possess the following qualities:

- **Precision**: Each Bowen move requires a precise application upon which the results depend. During the training program, teachers focus a great deal of attention on this aspect. Each move is directed to a precise anatomical location.

- **Acute Tactile Sensitivity**: This skill develops over time. It is important that therapists learn to sense muscle and fascia tension. This tactile sensitivity enables the therapist to properly adjust the tension applied on each muscle in accordance with the degree of tension felt in the soft tissue.
the role of the therapist

• **Patience:** It is imperative that Bowen therapists fully respect the instructions regarding pauses. At first, this practice may seem surprising, perhaps even bizarre, both for those giving as well as for those receiving the treatment. Patience is the greatest gift of Bowen therapists, for without pauses we would not be able to achieve the desired results.

• **Humility:** Bowen therapists must realize that their work consists simply in stimulating certain areas of the body. The real work is done by those receiving the treatment, that is, the Bowen moves trigger the body to heal itself. The results do not belong to the therapists, but to the application of the technique and to the action-reaction of the person to these stimulations.
Relaxation of the Lower Back

This procedure is used as a prerequisite to all other procedures practiced on the lower body, such as the pelvic, knee and ankle procedures. It contributes to the overall auto-regulation of the person and is useful for all imbalances in the lumbar area.

The person receiving the treatment lies on his stomach. The therapist begins by placing her fingers on the erector spinae muscles at the lumbar level, and initiates a move on each side of the spine. She then proceeds with a move to relax the gluteus medius muscles, which normally hold considerable tension. Following this move there is a two-minute pause. Resuming, the therapist applies pressure to the common tendon of the hamstrings, and performs a quick move on the biceps femoris muscle, followed by a very
relaxation of the lower back

light move on the iliotibial tract. After another two-minute pause, she ends this procedure by repeating the move on the gluteus medius muscles. This seemingly simple procedure is essential to the relaxation of the entire body.
Relaxation of the Upper Back

In addition to contributing to the overall auto-regulation of the body, the upper back procedure addresses musculoskeletal disorders between the cervical area and the lumbar region. It is also used to help resolve shoulder problems and to serve as a preparation for other upper body procedures.

The therapist places her fingers on the erector spinae muscles level with the tip of the shoulder blades. She performs four moves on these muscles, before pausing for two minutes. Near each shoulder blade, she stimulates the mid-trapezius muscles, the rhomboids, and the levator scapulae. This is followed by another two-minute pause. Finally, after having performed a move on the latissimus dorsi muscles, she then executes a series of moves in alternating directions on
relaxation of the upper back

the erector spinae muscles, starting from the lumbar region moving upward to the thoracic region. This completes the upper back procedure.
Relaxation of the Neck

As with the two preceding procedures, the neck relaxation procedure contributes to the overall auto-regulation of the body. Moreover, this move is particularly recommended for musculoskeletal problems of the cervical region and the shoulder girdle. It is also a prerequisite for the head procedure and for the temporomandibular joint procedure.

The person receiving the treatment lies on his back. Gently, the therapist executes a move on the posterior and middle scalene muscles, followed without pause by a move on the semispinalis of the head at the occipital level. After a two-minute pause, this procedure ends with a move on the upper trapezius muscles.
The Bowen technique uses approximately forty different regular moves, each targeting a particular joint or area. In addition, there are also more than forty specialized procedures.

During the first session with a client, the therapist will often choose to perform the three basic relaxation procedures as described above. Depending on the response to each of these moves, she can then choose to add one or two others during subsequent sessions.
However, it is imperative to remember that the less that is done, the more effective the treatment. Indeed, the fewer commands the brain receives, the better it is able to process this information.

It is therefore important to clearly understand this concept and not to overload the client with stimuli that could jeopardize the crucial stimulation. Physical exercises may be recommended by the therapist.
Tom Bowen perfected a technique for each joint. Thus, after having performed the basic relaxation procedures, the therapist may choose to add a procedure such as the one for the pelvic area. The pelvic procedure is particularly effective for lumbar pain and the enhancement of the circulation in the lower limbs. For example, the resulting softening of the inguinal ligament and the fascia iliaca, following the last move of the pelvic procedure, will improve venous and arterial circulation as well as nerve conduction of the lower limbs.

The sacro-iliac procedure seeks, amongst other effects, to release excessive tension in the sacrotuberous ligament and the posterior sacro-iliac ligaments, allowing the sacrum to resume its correct position and “float” between the iliac wings.
Various Techniques

The temporomandibular joint procedure produces rebalancing throughout the entire body. This results from the moves the therapist performs on the facial nerve, the pneumogastric nerve and on the cervical lymph nodes. This powerful and yet gentle lymphatic procedure is used in cases of colds, sinusitis and allergies, as well as in cases of migraine and vertigo. Obviously, it is also useful in treating ailments of the jaw and dental malocclusion.

The shoulder procedure is known to loosen frozen shoulders after only a few sessions. The challenge is performed on the posterior deltoid and the long triceps muscles. The relaxation of these two muscles exercise a direct effect on the circumflex nerve and the artery, which travel from back to front beneath the deltoid. Relaxation of the long triceps muscle may also result in freeing the radial nerve whose compression may cause paresthesia of the arm.
Various Techniques

Each of these procedures comprises between two and fifteen moves, often interspersed by pauses. Specific moves can be performed on the toes, ankles, knees, pelvis, hamstrings, sacrum and muscles of the anterolateral abdominal wall. They can also be applied to the shoulders, elbows, wrists, the entire vertebral column, the temporomandibular joint, and the head. Beyond the action applied to the specific area itself, all Bowen moves have an overall beneficial effect on the entire body, as they trigger the parasympathetic nervous system which allows for regeneration.

In addition, other procedures have an important lymphatic drainage effect. No procedure is performed internally. All are performed on the skin or, if required, through light clothing.
Specialized procedures are useful when dealing with unusual, persistent conditions that do not respond to regular procedures. It is understood, however, that combinations of regular procedures must first be explored before using these special techniques. Having fully mastered the regular techniques and having acquired a significant level of expertise through months or even years of daily practice, therapists are then ready to learn specialized procedures.

These procedures are powerful and will bring about a response from the entire body. The reaction to and resonance of these moves require longer pauses of up to 20 minutes to allow integration.
When these specialized techniques are used, it is best not to perform other moves during the same treatment session. In fact, a few of these procedures need to be performed on their own.

The execution of these moves differs slightly from that of regular moves. Some demand a stronger and longer challenge on the muscle. Such is the case with the psoas muscle procedure.

In addition, in order to help alleviate lower back pain, practitioners may perform the psoas procedure, as this muscle is often responsible for lumbago. This procedure can also be used in respiratory problems as there is a fascial link between the iliopsoas and the diaphragm near the second lumbar vertebra.
Another specialized technique consists of the simultaneous stimulation at the proximal and distal extremities of a limb segment, in order to create a collision of the two shock waves at the centre of this limb segment. This approach is used in the gracilis muscle procedure.

The rhomboid muscle procedure is used in cases of discomfort when elevating or adducting the shoulder blades, as well as in alleviating pain in the subscapular region.

The soleus muscle procedure is used in cases of chronic ankle problems (for example: edema near the internal malleolus accompanied by difficulty flexing the ankle), or when there is intense pain in the heel or in the Achilles tendon.
From time to time Tom Bowen would propose certain gentle exercises to his clients and he would insist that they do them. In fact, he would refuse to continue treating those who did not follow his recommendations.

These exercises are simple stretching and must be performed two to three times a day without straining. The clients are instructed to be mindful of their personal comfort threshold. An exercise causing pain may indicate that the nociceptors (the neurological pain receptors) have been awakened and that the body is no longer in parasympathetic mode; the process of auto-regulation cannot be activated when the body is defending itself and experiencing pain. Clients need only perform the exercises as best they can, doing a bit more whenever possible, and stopping at the onset
of any unease. The exercises can be performed several times a day; the more a joint is mobilized in an acceptable and painfree manner, the better the chances of its recovery. Limbs are meant to move and muscles to slide along each other in order to massage internal organs and to stimulate lymphatic circulation in such a way as to more efficiently eliminate organic waste accumulated in the tissues. Physical movements of the muscles pumps blood and lymph back to the heart. Joints must be activated to move the lubricating synovial fluid and to allow this fluid to renew itself.

To reinforce what the treatment has initiated, specific exercises are given for the shoulders, hamstring, knees and pelvis. Do not hesitate to ask your therapist to show them to you.
Various Techniques

Extended periods of heavy exercise are not recommended following a Bowen session as this may hinder any beneficial effects. Similarly, hot baths, massages, sessions in a spa, acupuncture treatments and other bodywork treatment or strong external stimulations, even emotional, risk halting the subtle healing action created by the Bowen moves. One should remain calm and relaxed for several days following the treatment.
Conclusion

There is still much to say about this extraordinary technique, and more yet to be discovered. We are taking the first steps leading towards a new understanding and a new way of dealing with the human organism. Research is underway to better understand the physiological reactions triggered by the Bowen moves. Thousands of therapists throughout the world have discovered the myriad applications of this new healing method. And each year, the list of applications grows longer. Having applied the Bowen technique to hundreds of clients for many years, I am still astonished to see the results obtained after only a few moves. It is a technique that brings deep satisfaction to the therapist. It often surpasses our understanding and commands our admiration.
For more than fifteen years now I have made it my main practice and since June 2000 I have been teaching the Bowen technique. My teaching has taken me to Europe, South America, USA, Australia, New Zealand and across Canada.

Tom Bowen’s last years were very difficult. He lost both legs within an interval of a few years due to diabetes from which he never recovered. He left behind an extraordinary heritage, and, through his favourite saying, he humbly suggested how his technique can best be applied.

“‘I expect to pass through this world but once, any good thing therefore that I do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow-creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall never pass this way again.’”
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I began writing this book in Paris, and continued it in Ouistreham in Normandy, at Grimsby near Niagara, and at l’Anse-Pleureuse in Gaspésie, finishing it in Montreal, Canada — all magical and inspiring landscapes. Thanks to the precious assistance of certain people, this project was brought to completion. I offer my thanks to Martine, Lidia, Mario, Hector, Barbara, Hélène, Pierre, Joël and André, Rosemary, Lisa, Jennie, Jordan, Marie, Théo and Luis, Julien and Odile. I thank them for their support, their advise, their presence. No matter where we are, it is those who surround us who make a difference. Together we created a wonderful, inspirational book of which we can all be proud.

Louise Tremblay
Senior instructor of the Bowen Therapy
Has finished the 6-year program of the “Académie Sutherland d’Ostéopathie du Québec”
www.techniquebowen.com
www.louisetremblay.com
louise.tremblay@techniquebowen.com