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# Lesson that's no pain in the neck

Golders Green therapist Elizabeth Abrahams eases her clients' aches with the Alexander Technique. She explains how lessons in this preventive therapy can help banish the nagging pain of 'text neck' or the 'iHunch' and even free you to get back to the gym

**D**o you feel drained, uncomfortable, or does your back ache by the end of the day? Rather than start the New Year with the same old nagging shoulder pain or stiff neck, why not do something about it?

The Alexander technique allows you to do whatever you want - whether it's working at the computer, working out in the gym, training for a marathon, or playing the bassoon.

You just learn to do those things without injuring yourself.

Most people book a one-to-one lesson with an Alexander Technique teacher because they are in pain. It can help with chronic or recurrent backache, tendonitis, sciatica, a slipped disc, osteoporosis, and repetitive

strain injuries.

It's called a lesson because you learn how to look after yourself, to recognise the warning signs, and become adept at lessening or avoiding pain altogether.

People often start to see changes after half a dozen lessons. Even after their first lesson many feel lighter, more comfortable, more energetic, and calmer. The benefits carry on long after lessons have stopped.

The results of a study published last year show that Alexander Technique patients with chronic neck pain experienced a significant long term decrease in pain.

In 2008 the British Medical Journal published a study of patients with chronic back pain, concluding that the Alexander Technique offers significant long-term benefits.



We've evolved over millions of years but we haven't adapted well to sitting at a desk for hours on end glued to a computer. Sucked into the world of the screen, we hold our neck and upper back in awkward positions, putting tremendous strain on our spine.

We tune out any warning signs of discomfort and don't do anything until we are in real pain. The resulting injuries can be chronic and debilitating.

Being permanently in contact with the rest of the world via smart phones, tablets and laptops adds yet another layer of pressure.

It's quite rare to spot someone walking down the street who isn't checking their missed calls, texts or tweets. Craning their neck as they peer at the screen has given rise to two new, painful conditions; "Text Neck" and the "iHunch"

Understanding how to alleviate a tired achy back and reduce the risk of injury is invaluable. Often it's the things we don't realise we are doing which are at the root of the problem.

We tend to rush through our lives on autopilot. By becoming more aware of how we are doing things, we can stop squandering our energy on excessive amounts of effort.

As Malcolm Balk, a Canadian Alexander teacher and running coach says: 'There's really no need to grip a pencil with the force needed to swing an axe.'

People often wonder if the Alexander

■ **Elizabeth Abrahams uses the Alexander Technique to teach you how to look after your body and recognise warning signs**  
 ■ **pictures:** Nigel Sutton

Technique is all about improving your posture. It is, but not by forcing yourself to stand up straight and pin your shoulders back in stiff military style. That's uncomfortable and unsustainable for more than a couple of minutes by which time you've sunk back down again.

It's funny how if you spot someone in the distance you can often recognise them by the distinctive way they hold themselves and move. That is in effect their posture. And it works best if they are moving with a mix of confidence and ease.

The technique was developed in the 1890s by Frederick Matthias Alexander, an Australian actor trying to discover why he kept losing his voice as he recited Shakespeare on stage.

Lessons normally include lying down with a couple of books to support your head to give your spine the maximum rest.

When another actor, Jonathan Pryce, who played Cardinal Wolsey in the BBC's *Wolf Hall*, was asked which book had changed his life he said: "The one the teacher put under my head during the Alexander Technique sessions at Rada. I grew an inch and a half."

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