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## Health Alternatives: The Alexander Technique

By Kay Hogan, M.Ed.



Kay working with a patient Photo provided

Recently an 81 year old friend of mine had a set of symptoms that might have sent her to the doctor. Before calling for an appointment, however, she consulted the patient handbook that she received from her medical provider. For her symptoms, the handbook recommended that she see a Feldenkrais Practitioner, Alexander Teacher or Rolfer. Because she does not have a computer or know much about health alternatives, she called me -- I am an Alexander Teacher.

Although The Alexander Technique is often mistaken for body work, it is actually an educational process that teaches movement and improves posture.

If you watch, in profile, a person move from a sitting position to standing, you might observe that they look down while pulling the head back into the body, pulling the shoulders up around their ears, arching both the low back and the neck and then putting their hands on their thighs as they pull down into their body and then struggle under the weight of that downward movement as they get up.

Over time, this will create neck and lower back problems. Instead, one should look into the horizon, releasing the head forward and up and letting the spine follow the movement which takes the weight out of the body and allows it to float up.

F.M. Alexander (1869-1955), the founder of the Alexander Technique, developed and taught his work at the end of the eighteenth century in London. His important discoveries were, "conscious use of self," meaning that you could bring movement to a conscious level and "direct" muscles to "lengthen and widen" instead of "shortening and tightening" which over time causes pain and wears out joints. Alexander also found that we have poor "habits" which, when we become aware of them, can be eradicated.

Because we have what Alexander referred to as "false sensory awareness," one needs the feedback from the hands of a trained professional in order to change.

Alexander Teachers attend a three-year course and are certified by a school that is approved by The American Society of Alexander Teachers.

An Alexander lesson is forty- five minutes to an hour and is designed to improve posture and movement. Often musicians, singers, actors and athletes take lessons for better performance, but many people come to a lesson in pain and want to avoid joint replacements and the use of debilitating drugs.

A recent study published by the British Medical Journal (BMJ) determined that back pain can be reduced by 85% through the study of the Alexander Technique. This research is online at: [http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/ful/337/aug19\\_2/a884](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/ful/337/aug19_2/a884).

For more information go to [www.alexandertech.org](http://www.alexandertech.org).

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