

Effects of The Bowen Technique on Flexibility Levels: Implications for Fascial Plasticity

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BACKGROUND: Hamstring strains are the most common sport-related injury in the lower limb, with high recurrence rates and lengthy recovery periods. Causal links between lack of flexibility and development of muscle strain injury are frequently reported. The financial implication of treating such injuries provides a continual drive to deliver more effective, evidence-based treatment. Since 1994, a complementary therapy called 'The Bowen Technique' has been used to treat inflexibility and many other conditions. The technique provides gentle rolling moves over fascial interfaces without heating, stretching or loading of the tissues. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the Bowen technique, on the hamstring flexibility of healthy subjects, over time.

METHOD: A single-blinded, longitudinal, RCT was performed on 116 male and female volunteers. Participants were randomly allocated into a control group or Bowen intervention group. Three hamstring flexibility measurements were taken from each subject over one week, using an active knee extension test and an electrogoniometer. An independent assessor verified the results.



RESULTS: Data were analysed using independent t-tests. Significant increases in hamstring flexibility were demonstrated in the Bowen group immediately post-test ($p < 0.0005$). These increases

maintained for one week ($p < 0.0005$) without further treatment.

CONCLUSION: A single treatment of the Bowen technique significantly increases the flexibility of the hamstring muscles in healthy subjects and maintains this increase for a period of one week. No previous study has demonstrated flexibility gains in the absence of tissue heating, stretching, loading or exercise. Previous quantitative research has reported sustained flexibility increases for a maximum of twenty-four hours. The absence of any form of tissue loading, stretching, heating or exercise invalidates explanations of: tissue creep, hysteresis or viscoelastic theories. This study has provided new information relating to the subject of flexibility. These results provide implications for fascially induced plasticity following stimulation of mechanoreceptors. Further research is required into such proprioceptive mechanisms in relation to manual therapy techniques.

