

## Pregnancy and Bowenwork: Natural Approach for Pain Relief During the Childbearing Year

By: Mary Falk, PT

The Bowen Technique is a natural and holistic manual therapy that can be of particular benefit to women before, during and after pregnancy. There is no other time in a woman's life when such rapid changes happen in her body. Gravity, hormonal changes, and a shifting center of gravity can be hard on the spine causing significant pain during the childbearing year. The beauty of



Bowen therapy is its simplicity and the basic understanding of the human body's inherent ability to heal. At a time when pain meds are not the preferred option, this treatment approach offers a pregnant woman hope for pain relief naturally.

The Bowen Technique originated in the 1950's by the late Tom Bowen of Geelong, Australia. With the gift of observing subtle deviations in anatomical structure, he discovered relationships in the body. With this understanding, he developed many moves and procedures that helped with a wide array of ailments and musculo-skeletal complaints. He was a humble man, attributing this as a "gift from God." The technique itself is a series of gentle moves performed over soft tissue structures in precise locations interspersed with wait periods. It is during the wait periods when the body processes the sensory information. Muscular tension decreases, blood flow improves, fascial restrictions release, and the body's autonomic nervous system shifts to rest, relax, and heal mode.

Prior to pregnancy Bowenwork helps to set the stage for healthy tissues at a cellular level. Tom Bowen would often treat couples to enhance fertility. There is a fertility protocol that has been developed and many couples have benefited as a result. It has been said that many a time a child was called "one of Tom Bowen's children" because up until being treated by him, a couple had been unable to conceive!

During pregnancy the center of gravity gradually shifts progressively more forward as the baby grows in size. The pelvis tilts more anteriorly and the low back curve becomes more pronounced. These changes place additional stress on the spine and pelvic joints and can result in low back pain or sciatica. Bowen Therapy can be performed in sitting or side lying so the pregnant mom can be seen throughout the entire pregnancy period as many times as is required.



On one occasion, a pregnant client in her 9<sup>th</sup> month came to my clinic complaining of pain in the front of her pelvis and in her low back. The pain made it very uncomfortable to walk or sleep at night. After two sessions, she was feeling marked improvement with resolution of her pain. Often times, the symphysis pubis (the front of the pelvis) can be a source of discomfort due to ligamentous laxity. The hormone, relaxin, is secreted to help the ligaments stretch allowing for the ever increasing size of the growing baby. The gentle Bowenwork moves triggered a healing response in this client at a time when she needed to be feeling well for her labor and delivery.

Breech presentation has also been shown to correct itself after a Bowen treatment. Recently a client was seen in her 36<sup>th</sup> week with breech presentation. She was seen one time where a combination of moves over her low back and pelvis was performed. Within the week, her follow up ultrasound confirmed that her baby had turned into the head down position.

*Rick Minnery, one of the Lancaster midwives in England sent this anecdote to Sandra Gustafson, Senior Bowenwork instructor, on the subject: "A colleague (midwife) asked me if Bowen might help to turn her baby round (she was carrying her baby breech at 35+ weeks) and was anxious to avoid possible caesarean birth or run the risk of a vaginal breech delivery. I gave her one treatment session with the pelvic procedure, and she phoned two days later to say the baby had flipped over, into a cephalic (head) normal presentation. She was delighted – I was gob smacked!"*

After delivery, the new mom may have pain in her low back, pelvis, or perineum (area between the vulva and rectum) due to a prolonged or difficult birth. Research shows that pain in her perineum may linger in the postpartum period, especially if this was her first child, an episiotomy or tear resulted during vaginal delivery, or if an epidural for pain relief was used during the second stage of labor. Also, the new mom may experience pain and discomfort in her upper back or neck region from the new postures associated with prolonged nursing. She can be so focused on helping the baby latch on that she is not aware of her hunched shoulders and the position of her neck. Mastitis, lactation problems, or blood engorgement respond favorably to Bowenwork and the particular procedure that is used can be instructed to the client so that she is able to self treat at home. Bowenwork procedures are chosen to address the specific area of concern in order to promote healing.

Bowenwork is a valuable option for a woman's health during the childbearing year. It offers pain relief at a time when pain medications are avoided and traditional therapies do not bring adequate results. Numerous women have been helped with Bowen therapy for fertility, during pregnancy, delivery, and post partum. At a time when the body is changing in such a miraculous way to provide an optimal environment for the baby to grow, it is encouraging to know there is natural and holistic approach for pain relief when a shifting center of gravity causes havoc on the spine and pelvis.

#### Bibliography

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***Restoration Physical Therapy, LLC***: Owner, Mary Falk, PT has been a physical therapist since 1980 with previous experience teaching early pregnancy exercise classes, NICU infant stimulation, and developmental testing of NICU graduates. She is also an accredited Bowenwork practitioner offering Bowenwork services at her private practice in Lake Stevens, WA. For more information about Bowenwork, visit [www.restorationPT.net](http://www.restorationPT.net) or call 425-870-6609

