

Excerpt from *Back Trouble* by Deborah Caplan, M. A., P.T., and Alexander Technique Teacher

The following *Foreword* is by:

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Foreword

BACK TROUBLE IS a frustrating problem for both patient and physician. Physicians are trained to relate signs and symptoms to specific diseases and to diagnose and treat accordingly. But, in the case of chronic back pain, it is often impossible to make a specific diagnosis, and most treatments fail. The patient, increasingly dependent on analgesics, gets frustrated and depressed, and the physician loses tolerance for the patient he cannot treat. As a result, more than ninety percent of patients in chronic pain clinics are there because of back pain.

The impact of back pain is felt not only by physician and patient, but by society as a whole. The costs of medical care and of absenteeism from the workplace amount to many billions each year—yes, billions. Back pain is the most expensive disease of the middle-aged worker.

What is even more alarming is that the number of people who have back trouble is increasing while our understanding of the condition remains inadequate and our treatment haphazard.

Can the situation be changed? And how?

Let me start by saying that little will change until the medical community becomes more open-minded about legitimate alternatives to conventional—but usually unsuccessful—medical therapies. The Alexander Technique is one such alternative. It is a system for teaching people how to best use their bodies in ordinary action to avoid or reduce unnecessary stress and pain. It is a system of postural education, a way of heightening the kinesthetic sense.

My own exposure to the Alexander Technique came about quite by accident. As the neurosurgical director of a busy spinal surgery service, I am constantly alert to the need for qualified physical therapists who are knowledgeable about spinal mechanics and, equally important, are interested in care of patients with either acute or chronic back ailments. Finding such therapists is difficult, and when one opened her office near the Westchester Medical Center, I was delighted.

What amazed me about this new therapist was that her office contained only a chair and a table with a mat, and yet the patients I sent to her were getting better faster. I soon discovered that she was teaching them how to use their bodies with the ease of movement for which the body was designed and intended. Oh, yes, she gave them specific exercises, but most importantly, she used the Alexander Technique.

Well, up until that point, the only Alexanders I had been familiar with were Alexander the Great and Alexander's Ragtime Band. F. M. Alexander was a new acquaintance. It is not my objective to tell you about him or the Technique since you have bought this exciting book. I will say, however, that the uniqueness of the Alexander approach is that it emphasizes using the mind and body in unity. This is undoubtedly the best way to care for the back and alleviate back pain.

The Alexander Technique stresses unification in an era of greater and greater medical subspecialization. It enables patients with back trouble to get better faster and stay better longer.