

## Fact Sheet

# Alexander Technique- Learn your way out of pain

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### What is Alexander Technique?

AT is an educational intervention that helps people to reduce pain intensity and disability associated with chronic pain. The overall aim of AT is to improve postural support and coordination by consciously altering automatic responses and tonic muscular activity. AT is safe<sup>1</sup>, cost effective<sup>2</sup>, drug-free and has been found to reduce pain medication use<sup>3</sup>.

### Premise

A person's general health and well-being can be improved by teaching them skills to integrate cognition, postural support, breathing and balance. Alexander Technique provides strategies that individuals can apply in everyday tasks to assist in minimising unnecessary muscle tension and physical collapse.

### What is learnt?

- Skills that retrain response and action
- Improved self-observation and awareness
- Improved sensory appreciation
- Conscious control of dynamic postural tone and muscle tension
- Inhibition of task related anticipation and expectation
- Ability to modify and improve breathing patterns

### Benefits

AT provides both short and long-term gains for people in pain. People who learn AT modify their perception of pain and the underlying causes of pain. This fosters confidence and perceived control in the face of persistent pain. This can lead to improved self-efficacy.<sup>4</sup>

### Applications

As an experiential, practical form of health education, AT is well placed to play an important role in the biopsychosocial management of a wide variety of chronic musculoskeletal issues such as back pain, neck pain, joint osteoarthritis, as well as gait, postural and balance conditions such as Parkinson's disease.

### Evidence of effectiveness

Alexander Technique shows strong evidence for long term effectiveness for chronic back<sup>5</sup> and neck pain<sup>6</sup> and Parkinson's disease<sup>7</sup>, and preliminary evidence for pain associated with knee osteoarthritis<sup>8</sup>.

Physiological effects of AT show significant improvements in coordination of movement, gait, motor control and balance.

### Assurance

In Australia, Alexander Technique teachers are professionally represented by the Australian Society for Alexander Technique Teachers (AUSTAT). AUSTAT is affiliated with Alexander Technique societies around the world. Teacher membership to AUSTAT is open only to those individuals who have studied at an accredited Alexander Teacher Training School for a minimum of three years.

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#### Further Research into Alexander Technique

Research into the benefits of AT and underlying mechanisms of action are ongoing. Refer to the following link for more information on past and current research:

<https://www.alexandertechnique.com/research.htm>

#### Contact for further information or comment

Australian Society of Teachers of Alexander Technique (AUSTAT):

Chairperson      Mr. Michael Shellshear      0448 406 881

Secretary      Mr. David Moore      03 9486 5900

AUSTAT Scientific Research spokespersons:

Dr. Kate Morris      0407 569 655

Mr. Greg Holdaway      0408 257 174

#### References

- <sup>1</sup> Woodman, J.P. and Moore, N.R. Evidence of the effectiveness of Alexander Technique lessons in medical and health related conditions. *Int. J. Clin. Pract.* 2012, 66:98-112.
- <sup>2</sup> Hollinghurst, S., Sharp, D., Ballard, K. Randomised controlled trial of Alexander Technique lessons, exercise and massage (ATEAM) for chronic and recurrent back pain: economic evaluation. *BMJ* 2008, 337; a2656.
- <sup>3</sup> McLean, S., Brilleman, S., Wye, L. What is the perceived impact of Alexander Technique lessons on health status, costs and pain management in the real life setting of an English hospital. The results of a mixed method evaluation of and Alexander Technique service for those with chronic back pain. *BMC Health Service Report* 2015, 15: 293.
- <sup>4</sup> Woodman, J.P., Ballard, K., Hewitt, C. Self-efficacy and self-care related outcomes following Alexander Technique lessons for people with chronic neck pain in the ATLAS randomised controlled trial. *Eur. J. Integr. Med.* 2018, 17: 64 -71.
- <sup>5</sup> Little, P., Lewith, G., Webley, F., Evans, M., Beattie, A., Middleton, K., et al. Randomised controlled trial of Alexander Technique lessons, exercise, and massage (ATEAM) for chronic recurrent back pain. *BMJ* 2008, 337: a884.
- <sup>6</sup> McPherson, H., Tilbrook, H., Richmond, S., et al. Alexander Technique lessons or acupuncture sessions for persons with chronic neck pain. *Ann. Intern. Med.* 2015, 163: 653- 662.
- <sup>7</sup> Stallibrass, C., Sissons, P., Chalmers, C., Randomized controlled trial of the Alexander Technique for idiopathic Parkinson's disease. *Clin. Rehabil.* 2002, 16(7): 695 -708.
- <sup>8</sup> Preece, S.J., Jones R.K., Brown, C.A., Cacciatore, T.W., Jones, A. K.P. Reductions in co-contraction following neuromuscular re-education in people with knee osteoarthritis. *BMC Musc. Disorders* 2016, 17: 372.