

The gentle touch



Crack-crunch chiropractic may relieve back pain, but a less forceful approach gets down to the root cause. ANNA PASTERNAK reports

MIND & BODY

Nothing floors you faster than backache. I've noticed that the minute I feel unsupported in life, my back gives out. Whether it's the dull lower ache associated with PMT or spasms of sciatica, I have long suspected that my physical back pain was emotionally based.

Whatever the root cause, back-related problems appear to be spreading if the demand for chiropractic manipulation is any indication. In America, people are now seeking out the chiropractor's couch with the same frequency they consult the masseur or fitness trainer.

The latest form of manipulation currently sweeping the States is BEST (bioenergetic synchronisation technique), a non-intrusive, non-manipulative version which, unlike the traditional crack-crunch technique that is based on adjusting segments of the spinal column, and which can feel as if the body is being savagely snapped back into shape, is gentle and non-coercive.

One of the few BEST practitioners in Britain is Dr Douglas Diehl, a chiropractor for 20 years, who abandoned traditional methods after just two years of practice: "I realised that the crack-crunch technique was relieving the symptoms, but it was not changing the causes of why people were distressed or ill".

"I do not manipulate. I use light, digital pressure on the body, which is enough to get the nervous system reacting. The body doesn't need massive intrusion to activate it, and I prefer finesse to force," he says.

As soon as you enter Diehl's consulting room, he asks you to lie on a massage table on your back. His manner is academic rather than soft bedside. Instead of listening to your litany of woes, he asks you to put your hands in various positions on the body and raise your left leg to the ceiling.

"Mainstream chiropractic focuses on spinal mechanics, whereas I work with the neurology of the system," he says. "The central nervous system lies in the spinal column and controls 100% of what goes on in the body. My job is to clear the system of those blockages which cause the body to work in an aberrant manner."

Diehl's touch is light and his technique so quick it is almost impossible to believe it will work. He presses various points and, if you feel pain, he asks you to think about a word or image he intuitively - while you hold your breath. It is astonishing, but when you breathe out again the pain is gone. "I release patients' emotional blocks which are stored in the memory through these simple chiropractic adjustments," he adds.

According to Diehl, everyone has emotional traumas, past and present, that the body "locks" into its memory, often in a place he describes as below the realm of conscious thought. Our bodies then "replay" these old memories at different times, which can adversely affect our health.

He says that while you hold your breath during this technique, the system clears: "If you have oxygen depletion, the brain forgets everything, apart from the fact that it needs to breathe. While I stimulate the relevant point, the brain releases what it was holding on to, and

when you breathe out, it updates itself."

The treatment feels like acupuncture, but Diehl says: "Acupuncture pushes a specific point that corresponds to a meridian. I push points that block the neurological flow. These can be anywhere in the body and are not confined to specific meridians."

I was beginning to have my doubts about the veracity of this technique until Diehl's intuitive forces came into play. He holds your ankles and asks you to go back in time to replay some event. His accuracy at unearthing emotional patterns is staggering. Over four sessions, we unleashed my fear of failure, triggered at the age of 17 when I applied for university; I've looked at my relationships with men, with my father, and my obsessive capacity for anxiety.

After each session, I left the table feeling light-headed, as well as physically lighter. I have even retained a sense of inner calm, although Diehl himself is wary of being described as intuitive: "What I do is based on science," he says firmly. "I am a grounded practitioner, but the technique is quite an intuitive concept. I have a way of dialoguing with the body, which tells me where I need to go."

David Ronson, a 42-year-old banker, booked in with Diehl three years ago after a long-standing back problem worsened, causing such terrible spasms he could not move. "Usually chiropractors crack your neck, but what Dr Diehl did was remarkable. My back had been getting worse for two years but now I have no pain. It's difficult to deduce how it all works, but it is effective."

Lucy Fielding 35, first consulted Diehl about a back problem, too, but ended up tackling her fear of making a commitment. "I was terrified of getting married last September, as I'm from a broken home, but we cleared it in a day. He is quite different from anything I have

ever come across - he shifts things I don't even know I need."

BEST sessions last half an hour, making them perfect for slotting into hectic lives: "Stress is the conflict in our mind between the illusion of how we would like life to be and how it really is," explains Diehl. "All stress is stored in the nervous system. Health is not about the absence of symptoms and disease, it is the capacity of the body to adapt to a change in environment, whether physical or emotional."

"People get sick because they are working on a present response to a past experience. This causes the body to go into defence mode, so all the repair work has to stop. The resistance weakens and the immune system becomes less functional".

Diehl claims excellent results working with clients suffering from depression, ME, MS, migraines, digestive disorders and even cancer. "There really is no limit on who BEST can help. You don't catch a cold; you allow your system to get into a diminished state of resistance. I don't believe in incurable disease - I believe in incurable people who do not believe they can get well," he concludes.

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