



New hope for chronic back-pain sufferers

NEW HOPE has been given to the sufferers of chronic back pain following a trial of the Alexander Technique which aims to improve posture.

It is well known that better posture can ease the condition and a trial of the Alexander Technique involving 500 people found that, when combined with exercise, it led to significant improvements.

The technique helps align the head, neck and back muscles. The patients reported less pain and a better quality of life after taking up the technique, and some said they were able to do things which previously had been difficult, such as walking normally, getting out and about, and doing household jobs.

The patients were either given normal care, massage, six

or 24 lessons of the Alexander Technique.

Half the patients in each group were also given an exercise programme involving walking briskly for 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

Massage relieved the pain for the first three months, but the benefit did not last. But patients who had been trained in the Alexander Technique reported less pain and an ability to do more by the end of the year.

Those who had had six lessons and followed an exercise routine did almost as well as those who had 24 lessons.

The trial was large enough to provide good evidence for people to take it seriously, the *British Medical Journal* reported. Those who combined the

Alexander Technique with exercise improved by about 40pc to 45pc.

The Alexander Technique was developed in the 1890s by Frederick Alexander, an Australian actor who feared the hoarse voice he had developed towards the end of performance would finish his career. He reasoned that he was straining his vocal organs through tension, not only in his head and neck, but in his entire neuromuscular system.

The technique aims to restore the body to the easy posture of the young child, re-establishing the natural relationship between the head, neck and back which form the core of the body. As well as reducing pain, it is said to help ease tension and stress.

There are many Alexander Technique teachers in Ireland. Check out www.isatt.ie for the teacher nearest to you. The secretary of the society representing the teachers is Co. Clare-based Fiona Cranwell, 086 2228229.