

Article on Trend for Alexander Technique in Spas and Wellness Centers
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The ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE: The Newest 100 Year-Old Trend in European Spas & Wellness Centers

By Dana Ben-Yehuda, Certified Alexander Teacher

Movie stars, world-class athletes and the European elite just don't seem to age like the rest of us. Why? Perhaps it's because many practice the Alexander technique, a method to restore and maintain poise and balance of mind and body.

It is offered in spas and wellness centers in England and is listed in “*The Wellness Resource*” report as the wave of the future for spas that are “...operating on the leading edge of cultural change.”

Discovering What the Europeans Already Know

It's time to let the cat out of the bag on the best-kept secret of wellness centers and chronic pain clinics in Europe from Switzerland to Germany to England. Their secret is the Alexander Technique.

“The Champneys Group is Europe’s leader in health and fitness. Its reputation has been sustained for over 75 years... Champney’s treatments include ... the Alexander Technique.”

— Champneys Health Resort, Hertfordshire, England

“Grayshott Hall Health Fitness Retreat, once Victorian poet Alfred Lord Tennyson’s country hideaway... The spa offers a range of alternative treatments [including] the Alexander Technique.”

— Grayshott Hall, Hindhead, England

Embraced by Movie and Sports Stars

The most celebrated movie stars look elegant and stay upright in their carriage, open in their movements, and strong in their voice using the Alexander Technique. For over 100 years the Alexander Technique has been taught in drama and music schools across the country from Julliard in New York to ACT in San Francisco. It is required study for first year acting students at the Actors Studio Drama School at New School University in New York City.

Noted actors, musicians, and athletes have embraced this technique for decades to enhance performance and stage presence. Students of the technique include Sir Colin Davis, William Hurt, Jeremy Irons, James Earl Jones, Kevin Kline, Paul McCartney, Kelly McGillis, Paul Newman, Lynn Redgrave, Maggie Smith, Mary Steenbergen, Sting, Robin Williams, Joanne Woodward, and members of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

Movie stars aren't the only stars to have discovered and reaped the benefits of the Alexander Technique. Noted sports stars and athletes have successfully used the technique to improve their game.

“Last week at the PGA Tour’s Q school, 39-year-old Jeff Julian of Norwich, VT, gave himself back his career. He did it using....Alexander Technique.”

— Sports Illustrated, December 18, 2000, Golf Plus
Notebook: The Alexander Technique, The answer to a stress test.

Spa Trends: Youth & Energy & Living Well

The spa trend is wholeness; fully integrated modalities for body awareness and balance with complete offerings for total well-being and feeling one's best.

“Integration means to make whole or complete by bringing various parts together. Therefore, a spa is the epitome of integration. In fact, The I/Spa Education Committee defines TEN areas of spa education, includingAlexander (Technique). Last year The Wellness Resource designated three categories of spas: destination spas, resort spas, and day spas. This year we have added a fourth: the community-based wellness center”

— The Wellness Resource, 1997 Spa Business Report, Nancy Griffin, 11/1997

The Alexander Technique was presented at the 2002 International Wellness Conference in the United States and is the coming trend in spa and wellness centers offerings toward wholeness and health. ¹

Why Alexander Technique?

The Alexander Technique is a foundation to maximize the benefit for all other exercise and touch therapies. It is a basic tool for all people seeking release from the stress of daily life, looking to get back in touch with their bodies, and maintain good, youthful, balanced posture and full use of themselves over time.

The Alexander Technique is core, central, and primary. It works to teach you how to move better, feel better. It is about maximizing the benefit of anything else you do. It helps reduce excess effort in everything we do — from brushing our teeth to getting up out of a chair — thereby freeing up energy to use for living well.

Spa trends: total well-being

The trend in spas is to improve health as well as physical appearance, and because it improves both physical appearance and health, the movement is to offer Alexander Technique at wellness centers and health spas.

“A source of healing is what the Spa can and should be. People are no longer satisfied with superficial treatments and superficial answers; the spa is an area in which we can restore the connection of the person to themselves, to the earth and to other people.”

— Anne and Sara Bramham, The Bramham Institute at PGA National Spa

“In general, body-oriented therapies use the wisdom of the body to heal. Mind/body modalities unleash the power of the mind and spirit to heal the body. Integrative therapies—which go to work on mind and body simultaneously—can have the most powerful effect.”

— The Wellness Resource, 1997 Spa Business Report, Nancy Griffin, 11/1997

Alexander Technique is an integrative, mind-body modality that people can experience at a spa and continue at home with a private practitioner.

This is the missing link that has already been discovered by actors, musicians, and people in-the-know at both wellness centers and chronic pain clinics. In Switzerland, Britain and Israel’s national health services, in clinics from Switzerland to Germany this technique is being used to teach people how to restore their natural balance and poise.

Baby-Boomers Seek Fountain of Youth

The wellness trend involves not just a movement but a virtual tidal wave of 76 million people now between the ages of 35-53 who are reaching the age where health is no longer to be taken for granted. These Baby-Boomers grew up expecting to be and stay beautiful and healthy, and they now, more than ever, need a Fountain of Youth to stay that way. Alexander Technique is for all the people who remember Mad magazine and who may soon qualify for AARP but would not like to advertise that fact with their bodies.

Spa trend: alternative modalities

The trend towards alternative care in medical and beauty treatments is well-documented:

“A landmark study published in the November 11, 1998 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) found that an approximate 33% of US adults had used alternative therapies in 1990 and by 1997 had increased to 42.1%. In another survey conducted between April and May of this year by Intersurvey, a market research company, 66% of 1,148 American adults reported using alternative therapies.”²

“Making sick or injured people well often depends less on treatment than on providing support for the body while it essentially heals itself.”³

Clearly, the trend is toward alternative modalities. While the Alexander Technique is not a medical practice or a treatment, it is a holistic, mind-body re-educational approach to well-being that can have profound health benefits. Experience shows that use — how we use ourselves in the normal course of our day — affects how we function. Many thousands of people have found that by taking a series of lessons in the Alexander Technique, they have obtained tremendous relief from problems ranging from back and neck pain, to arthritis, carpal tunnel, and a host of stress-related illnesses. It is quieting to the nervous system and centering; most important, it is a method of learning self-care that leaves its students empowered to continue forward on their own.

What is Aging & is it a Natural Part of Life?

No less than Stanford University’s CAMPS (Complementary and Alternative Medical Program at Stanford) states that:

“...New research is dramatically changing the way we view aging and the aged. Some of the most important research demonstrates that much of what we call aging is not the inevitable decline we have long assumed it to be. And, to a surprising extent, we are responsible for the quality of our own old age.”⁴

Much of what we call aging is a function of yielding to gravity. Maintaining our youthful posture means staying upright and not caving over and, thereby, staying younger longer.

Having good posture in activity makes people look better, thinner, and measurably taller. It is only common sense to realize that an open chest and upright spine offer room for better breathing and digestion. Look better, feel better, move better. Things not to be taken lightly as we age.

The Alexander Technique Helps Hold Back the Clock

Think of an old person and what comes to mind? Hunched over shoulders, collapsed chest, heavy steps, lost height, protruding stomach, zapped energy, and difficult movements; the picture is not pretty. Long habit patterns of poor posture in activity become the “camel whose face got frozen that way.” People are “stuck” in the exaggeration of years of habits that just somehow crept in and took over.

The Alexander Technique is a way of un-doing those habit patterns and holding back the clock by releasing the head and neck from the unnecessary pressures they are placing upon the entire being. Everything one perceives is transmitted via nerves that run through the spine up to the brain. By this gentle re-education the restoration of a proper poise of the head, neck, and back is achieved, patterns of excess tension are undone, and a natural balance is restored.

The results can be very dramatic; people can gain up to an inch and a half in “lost” height that was due to collapse. Lungs have room to breathe and literally the breath that is life is restored. Upright carriage allows room for the natural process of digestion to take place. Pressure is relieved from the joints allowing freedom in movement, and very often, a reduction in pain.

Who was F.M. Alexander?

F.M. Alexander, an Australian actor b. 1869, developed the technique to cure what his doctors called his “incurable” vocal troubles. He made his discoveries and solved his voice problems around 1890 and began teaching and improving his technique as he applied it to help others with similar problems. He went to England in 1904 where he continued his teaching practice. Doctors began sending him their “hopeless case” patients, who kept getting better under his guidance. Nineteen doctors published the results of their successful case studies of the Alexander Technique in the British Medical Journal.

In the early 1930’s, he embarked on a journey to train teachers in this technique, so future generations could reap its benefits. It has been in continuous practice for all this time.

How is the Alexander Technique Taught?

Taught by highly trained teachers⁵ in individual lessons working with the specific needs of each person, it can restore the natural grace and poise that is the birthright of youth, the loss of which is the hallmark of what we would usually call the inevitable “ravages of old age.”

The Alexander Technique is a gentle way of working, using a combination of words and our thoughts to guide ourselves, together with very gentle hands-on guidance from a teacher who simultaneously gives a correct kinesthetic experience. That experience, repeated in a series of lessons, often results in profound changes both in appearance and the actual experience of health; it is true mind-body well-being. It has been in continuous

use for over 100 years and has been a constant presence in renowned U.S. schools of theatre, music, and dance.

Restoring Childhood Ease

The Alexander Technique can restore the natural balance, poise, and coordination that is the birthright of childhood, but that we often lose along the path to adulthood. Our efforts to maintain our youth are for naught unless we learn to counteract the effects of our own bad habits of posture in activity, being too tense and stressed, being overly collapsed and pulled down, and getting stuck in these patterns. All the exercises in the world are only as good as the way we perform them. The Alexander Technique is a way of improving the overall use and coordination with which we do all our activities. It can:

- Increase energy
- Decrease weight
- Improve circulation, breathing, digestion, and sexual function
- Improve skin tone, color, and overall vitality and oxygen capacity
- Relieve joint problems and back and neck pain
- Alleviate systems of arthritis and carpal tunnel syndrome
- Restore some if not all of height lost due to poor posture

People can look younger, feel better, and function better in all aspects of life, both of mind and of body.

The movement toward holistic approaches is clearly present in Europe, and the next wave of the future of the United States.

The secret is out and the demand will race across the Atlantic to wellness centers and destination spas striving to offer the best services to their discriminating and knowledgeable clientele. This is an idea whose time has come.

¹ See www.iwellcon.com/default.cfm for more information.

² See www.reliefband.nl/4.html for more information.

³ From the Massachusetts General Hospital Newsletter, Vol. 47, No. 2, 3/88.

⁴ See <http://camps.stanford.edu> for more information.

⁵ AmSAT (American Society for the Alexander Technique <http://www.alexandertech.com>)



P.O. Box 60008, Florence, MA 01062
Phone: 1-800-473-0620

Certified teachers of the Alexander Technique have undergone a rigorous training of at least 1600 hours of instruction over a minimum of 3 years through an AmSAT approved training course. All qualified teachers have trained either in AmSAT qualified schools or in schools run by official affiliated societies – see list of schools affiliated with Britain's STAT (Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique, <http://www.stat.org.uk>). Today there are about 2500 qualified teachers worldwide with about 700 qualified teachers in the United States.

Biographical note:



Ms. Ben-Yehuda is an AmSAT Certified Teacher of the Alexander Technique and lives and works in Mountain View, CA. She currently serves as the Chair of the Media Relations Group for AmSAT (American Society for the Alexander Technique).
Contact: dbenyehuda@attbi.com (650) 964-4308