



Desperate journey to ease a chronic spinal disorder

If you suffer from back pain, where do you go?
Fiona Purdon reports

ABOUT three million people will go to a healthcare specialist for back pain this year — and I will be one of them.

During the years, I have spent a small fortune on my back, trying an A to Z range of therapies, since a gymnastics injury as a 12-year-old.

But I am not alone. Chiropractors Association Queensland president Bronwyn McNamara, of Wellness Clinic, says statistics show about 80 per cent of Australians will experience disabling low-back pain during their lives.

Pondera physiotherapist David Peirce and McNamara say that the common causes of back pain are muscular, tendon and ligament injuries, musculoskeletal conditions such as ruptured or bulging discs or bone degeneration while bad posture, lack of exercise, a sedentary lifestyle and even poor nutrition and depression are contributing factors.

Besides the medical profession, complementary therapy is an option, especially if you have a personal recommendation.

Treatment guide

1. PHYSIOTHERAPY

Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates started basic physical therapy in 450 BC but it was not until 1894, with four British nurses, that the profession became organised. Physiotherapy helps people restore a muscle balance with exercise programs and sometimes manipulative procedures. A four-year university course is required. For more information: physiotherapy.asn.au

My experience: Pondera Physiotherapy — David Peirce (Pondera, West End) A thorough look at my history and then examination including an ultrasound. My childhood injury had made my pelvic muscles hyperextended so I have a poor foundation and my spine has over-compensated with some over-working and under-working muscles. I had a hands-on treatment to loosen my tight vertebrae muscles and have started an exercise program.

2. BOWEN THERAPY

Bowen Therapy was developed by Australian Tom Bowen (1916-1982) and is a

gentle and holistic approach to healing that is used worldwide. Each session involves a series of subtle rolling moves to either tighten or loosen muscles and ligaments, beginning with general stress loading points such as the lower and upper back. A diploma course is available at Bowen Association Australia. For more information: www.bowen.org.au

My experience: Bowen for Health (Rosedale) and Gabrielle Radcliffe (Ormeau)

I have had several successful treatments during the years. It can sometimes take several visits for the pain to disappear but it is a gentle procedure.

3. OSTEOPATHY

Osteopathy was founded in the US in 1874 by Andrew Still who created a system that recognises the interdependence of all body systems. Queensland Osteopath president Melinda Banks, of Balance Osteopathic medicine, says therapists can use about a dozen hands-on techniques ranging from gentle to direct manipulation. She says osteopaths comprehensively chart a patient's medical history. Osteopaths study a five-year masters degree. For more information: www.osteopathic.com.au

My experience: Un-named practice I was in severe pain and the only available therapist at my local health centre was the osteopath. I had no personal recommendation. After a relaxing 20-minute massage the osteopath did some direct manipulation on my spine and I was in even more pain than before. It sounds like I was unlucky because Banks says osteopaths have a high success rate in treating back pain. Maybe I needed a more gentle approach.

4. CHIROPRACTIC THERAPY

Chiropractic therapy was founded in the 1890s by Daniel Palmer in the US. Palmer, a magnetic healer, believed that manual manipulation of the spine could cure disease. McNamara says chiropractors have a holistic approach and long-term treatment plans. There is a focus on joints using hands-on manipulation and specifically designed instruments. A five-year degree is available. For more information: www.chiropractors.asn.au

My experience: I went to a chiropractor with a free spinal check-up shopper docket but the chiropractor was unable to see me.

5. REMEDIAL MASSAGE THERAPY

Writings on massage have been found in many ancient civilisations including Rome, Greece, India, Japan, China, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Massage relieves severe tension in the muscles and the connective tissue as well as breaking up strains, relaxing nerves and promoting blood circulation. TAFE diploma courses or an equivalent level are required but there is a wide variety of training levels and skills in the unregulated industry. For more information: www.aamf.com.au

My experience: Paul St John (Cooorparoo)

There is a huge waiting list to see St John, who is not taking new clients. I jokingly refer to him as my superman. I have lax spinal ligaments and lack strength and stability with my core muscles so my pelvis often twists. St John always gets me realigned with massage and helps relieve the pain.

6. ACUPUNCTURE

China is traditionally thought of as the home of acupuncture possibly dating back to the Stone Age. Acupuncture is a technique of inserting and manipulating fine filiform needles into specific points on the body to relieve pain and for therapeutic purposes such as to reduce inflammation, to relax nerves and to stimulate muscle usage. Acupuncture is safe when administered by well-trained practitioners using sterile needles. In an unregulated industry seek association members including Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association practitioners. For more information: www.acupuncture.org.au

My experience: Paul St John (Cooorparoo)

I had 14 needles placed around my lower back to relax nerves and stimulate my spinal muscles and ligaments. With my latest visit my back pain was relieved by a combination of acupuncture and massage therapy while a Bowen therapy move with my sacrum muscle stopped my pelvic pain.

7. PILATES

Pilates is a physical fitness system



developed in the early 20th century by Joseph Pilates in Germany. The program focuses on the core postural muscles that help keep the body balanced and are essential in providing support for the spine but there is also an all-body focus. Queensland is a world leader in integrating Pilates for back treatment after landmark University of Queensland physiotherapy research in the early 1990s. Former physiotherapist Tanya Winter, of Studio Pilates, is part of the Pilates revolution. She used her eight years' experience as a Pilates instructor to help treat her own severe ski injury when she fractured lower vertebrae and was bedridden for three months. Pilates returned her muscle strength to ensure she was pain-free. She says Pilates can help with every back

injury. It is not a regulated industry with a variety of courses available so seek a personal recommendation. For more information: www.studiopilates.com
My experience: Tanya Winter (Studio Pilates, Hawthorne)
 It has taken me a few years but I now know I cannot live without Pilates. The year I did Pilates (with Madonna Ellaby in 2006), when I was recommended by St John, I had no breakdowns. A massage always helps but if my muscles remain weak then pain is never far away. So I have returned to Pilates, starting with a one-on-one session with Winter. She recommends all first-timers start with a personally tailored program because further back damage can be done with general classes. After performing several exercises Winter found

I was not using my butt muscles, that I needed to do more stretching and my right side was stronger. I now do exercises daily from their *Back to Basics* DVD. Peirce, also a strong believer in Pilates which he offers at his practice, says that people have to see their bodies like a sports team which requires a crew of specialists working together. McNamara and Banks agree.
 "The thing is that people get locked into thinking they need only one discipline, there is no reason why you can't combine chiropractic with acupuncture, physiotherapy and Pilates," Peirce says. "You have to be open-minded, nobody can help you with everything, no one has all the answers."



