

Alexander Technique For Non-Surgical Treatment Of The Cervical Herniated Disc

Alexander Technique is a specialized form of therapy, which can be utilized to treat a cervical herniated disc. I had the opportunity to speak with Judy Stern who is one of the world's leading experts on Alexander Technique. She is a teacher, who travels all over and has a practice in Rye, New York. Let us hear what she has to say about Alexander Technique for the treatment of cervical herniated disc disease.

Hi, I am Judy Stern, and I am a teacher of the Alexander Technique, but I am also a physical therapist, so I have a double skill, and for the first 18 years of my life, I worked as a physical therapist, seeing people with herniated discs in their neck and many other things as well, and then I learned about the Alexander Technique from a cousin who had a herniated disc. __Que: In the neck? Ans: No, it was the low back, __ and I was completely fascinated by the idea that I could work less hard, I could teach someone to get well and then to stay well, and that I could do that in a much more holistic way than treating a neck or low back or an elbow. The Alexander Technique for sure is an approach to health and well being for the whole system and assuming that if you take the compression out of the system, it does not like compression and then actually gets injured with compression, that if you could remove the compression that comes with tension and stress, that oftentimes the structures that are being compressed and creating problems, even a radiculopathy, can be alleviated.

Que 1: Is Alexander, is it an exercise, is it something you talk about it, just what is it?.
Yeah.

Ans: So I am very fond of saying that the Alexander Technique is the how to of how to do everything. So an Alexander lesson consists of two parts. One is the practical part where I work with you on how to sit, stand, bend, walk, play the violin, be at the computer. The other part is a lesson that happens on our table that looks a little bit like a massage table, where I teach you in a more passive way how to think and create ease in your system.

Que 2: So, it sounds like this is a one-on-one type of therapy, is that right?

Ans: In general, especially for someone with a herniated disc, one-on-one is absolutely the way to go because what I will do the lesson is give you an experience of your kinesthetic self that is different from what you are now, and the hands on part of that lesson is really what makes the difference.

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Que 3: I know. I have heard wonderful things about Alexander Technique for people with all sorts of pains, and I refer patients to you and have for years.

Ans: It is true.

Que 4: How long have we known each other, Judy?

Ans: Oh my god, 25 years.

Que 5: You do miracles for patients, and I tell people that you are a true healer, but when I have a patient with a herniated disc with pressure on the nerve, there is pain going down the arm, numbness, tingling, I really do not know what could you do to help that, like how are you going to approach that?

Ans: So my approach to that is first of all if somebody has hard neurological signs and excruciating pain, I would never see them myself. I would send them immediately to be evaluated before I would try the Alexander Technique. That is sort of a rule of thumb for me.

Que 6: Who is your perfect patient?

Ans: My perfect patient is someone with soft signs. Someone who may have something that someone calls a bulging disc or may have a mild herniation, has symptoms that are on and off that tells me there is some real chance that if the symptoms go off and on that I could teach them how to keep them off, so with someone who is an extremist, it is like somebody having a heart attack, you do not put your hands on them. You call EMS.

Que 6: Perfect. So just to clarify and help people out there, if you have severe pain, numbness, tingling, weakness down the arm, big herniated disc, probably _____ would not be your first step?

Ans: You need a neurological evaluation, and I would not want someone to come here for that, but what I like is the patient with a herniated disc who is indecisive. We are not sure whether surgery is indicated. Were you looking for a conservative trial to see if we can alleviate the pressure on the spine and let that disc reabsorb or actually move back to where it belongs to take the downward pressure away.

Que 7: Great, and how do we find an Alexander teacher. You are here where we are, but for someone watching the video in Oklahoma, what do they do, how do they start?

Ans: There is a national web site, it is called AMSAT, the American Society for Teachers of the Alexander Technique, and there is a directory; it is by state and area,

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usually probably by a zip code, and if you are looking for a teacher in your area, you can go to that web site and you can find a teacher.

So the bottom line, I love Alexander technique, but I am not sure it is for everybody with a cervical herniated disc. What you learn with Alexander is really great and will help you with every part of your life. It is certainly worth a try if you have a cervical herniated disc. Within a week or two of lessons, you will know whether it is for you, and if you are getting better, by all means, continue with it. If not, then you will have to move on to more aggressive treatments, but I think the lessons you learn from your Alexander teacher will help you with body mechanics, how you sit, how you stand forever.

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