

# **JOURNAL**

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*A Review of the Current Options  
for Dental Hygienists*

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*Incisive Blocks – simple, fast and very useful*

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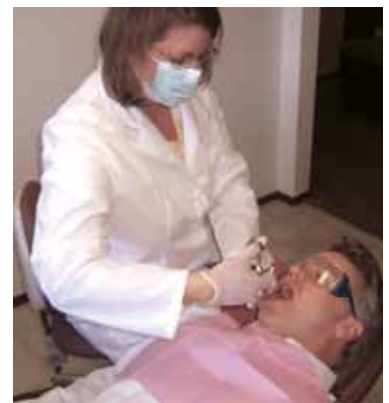


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Painting by Jane W. Ferguson. Artist profile on following page.

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## Learning to Work Pain Free – The Alexander Technique

As my dental hygienist bends over me and prepares to clean my teeth, I look up at her and relax in my chair. I can feel the soft cushioned pillow that she has placed behind my neck to ensure my comfort. As my thoughts turn to my caregiver, I wonder about her comfort. I watch as she leans over my body and stretches to turn on the water for me to rinse my mouth, and then bends back around to look at my x-rays. After reaching up to adjust the angle of the light, she makes minute repetitive movements to scale my



Compromising Posture

teeth with careful precision. At the end of my appointment, I notice that as she stands up to say good bye, her hands go to her lower back, pressing inward as she arches to stretch.

Have you wondered how it would feel to have energy rather than low back pain at the end of a work day? As a teacher of the Alexander Technique, I know that dental hygienists can learn how to work pain free.

The Alexander Technique is widely recognized in medical communities in the United States and abroad for its positive effects on pain relief. The Technique focuses on changing the postural habits that are often at the root of many physical aches and pains.

While many students of the Alexander Technique take lessons for pain relief, others take lessons to enhance their physical performance abilities. Athletes, singers, dancers and musicians use the Technique to improve their breathing, vocal production as well as their speed and accuracy of movement. Students of the Technique learn how to achieve a greater consciousness in controlling their bodies. Considering that most individuals have habitual patterns of tension that have been consciously or unconsciously

learned, developing an awareness of these patterns and “unlearning” them, enables students to redirect themselves into an optimal state of well being and function. Lessons in the technique reawaken an internal kinesthetic sense that, out of habit, has become out of balance. It is as if we are uncon-

sciously directing our movements by a compass that is no longer pointing north, we are not able to sense that we are out of balance. Students of the Technique learn to adjust their inner compass so that their internal sense of space, or proprioception, functions better.

Current research demonstrates the positive effects of the Alexander Technique for patients with chronic pain issues as well as for a variety of professionals, including healthcare providers. In a recent study on low back pain published in the British Medical Journal, participants in the study group receiving 24 lessons in the Alexander Technique reported only three days of pain per month as compared to the subjects in the massage group with fourteen days of pain. A third group received only 6 lessons in the Technique and reported eleven days of pain per month.<sup>1</sup> Research conducted by physicians at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center indicates that the Alexander Technique

### What is the Alexander Technique?

A proven approach to self care, the Alexander Technique is a hands-on method for teaching individuals how to unlearn habitual patterns causing tension and pain in daily activities.

Effective for:

- neck and low back pain
- carpal tunnel/ repetitive stress injuries
- shoulder pain
- chronic pain and stress

### How is the Alexander Technique taught?

Alexander Technique is generally taught in one-on-one lessons. Each lesson is approximately 45 minutes. During a lesson, a certified teacher uses both words and gentle, hands-on guidance to provide improved coordination. Students are fully clothed, and are either sitting, standing, or lying on a table.

### How many lessons do I need before I see a change?

The number of lessons will depend on your individual physical condition, interests and goals. You will be able to apply new insights starting with the first lesson. After 6 to 10 lessons you should notice that the Alexander Technique is carrying over into your daily activities. The duration of study, or number of lessons, is based on the individual. Rather than a temporary solution with short-term results, lessons bring about gradual change and long-lasting results.

can enhance the posture and proficiency of surgeons who perform minimally invasive procedures, thereby reducing surgical fatigue and potential errors.<sup>2</sup> The goal of the study was to test the hypothesis that the Technique significantly enhances surgical ergonomics and proficiency with the ultimate goal of incorporating it into graduate surgical training. Minimally invasive surgical techniques often require that operators maintain awkward, non-neutral, static postures leading to high muscular loading and an increased risk for operator fatigue and injury. The pediatric urology residents and fellows who participated in the study reported improved posture and endurance following training in the Alexander Technique. Pramod P. Reddy, M.D, lead investigator of the study, reported that larger trials, including a variety of surgical specialties, will be conducted to further test the hypothesis at the University of Cincinnati.<sup>2</sup>



The Alexander Technique has the power to provide individuals with a renewed sense of vitality. Students learn to make regular pauses in their daily routines as a means of avoiding the tension that accumulates with any repetitive action. A good analogy is when you ride on a roller coaster. Learning to pause and readjust is a way to stop the roller coaster, take a breath, look around, and then let go. You can get back on the ride but the tension is gone. The Alexander

### How did the Alexander Technique get started?

A Shakespearean actor, F.M. Alexander was born in Australia in 1869. As his acting career was getting started Alexander developed chronic hoarseness while performing. When leading physicians were not able to find a cause of his laryngitis, he thought that the cause might be related to how he was using his voice and he worked on developing a solution. Using a system of mirrors allowing him to study his posture and muscle movements, he found that upright posture, proper breathing and smooth, fluid muscle movements improved his condition. Learning to speak without habitual patterns of tension, he no longer experienced vocal problems. He regained a full, rich voice and was able to return to the stage. He found that his posture and overall coordination had improved and he no longer had the breathing problems he had experienced since childhood.

As Alexander further studied the relationships between habit, thought and perception, he was

able to teach his discoveries to other actors with such success that physicians began referring patients with various breathing and coordination problems to him. When the news of his successes spread, people came from around the world to study his techniques.

Formal training programs developed out the growing interest in Alexander's techniques. Today, over 100 years later, there are thousands of certified Alexander teachers worldwide.

AmSAT is the largest professional organization of teachers of the Alexander Technique in the United States. AmSAT-certified teachers have completed a comprehensive training over a minimum of three years at an approved teacher-training course. For a local teacher, or more information on the Alexander Technique go to [www.amsatonline.org](http://www.amsatonline.org)



Technique is a holistic way to address muscle pain and improve overall performance. It is an individualized skill that increases your body awareness and ultimately empowers you throughout your workday and beyond.

### About the Author

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