



FEATURE

# *Bowen Therapy*

Words & Images Helen Anderson

***B**owen Therapy, the Australian made complementary health modality that is sweeping the world and gaining enormous respect from other health care professionals!*



## *What is Bowen Therapy?*

Bowen is a soft tissue technique where by the therapist applies a transverse move across the fibres of muscles, ligaments and tendons, whilst having a marked influence on the connective tissue (otherwise known as fascia). The technique also influences known trigger points (pain points) and acupuncture points.

Bowen is not massage. Bowen therapists do a single transverse (two directional) move at a specific location and then leave the area alone, whereas massage therapists often do repeated movements along muscle fibres, working throughout the body. It goes without question that massage is highly therapeutic, with its stimulatory action and may address many problems at some level. The feedback from therapists and clients that have experienced Bowen suggests that the Bowen modality would appear to have a deeper and more profound action that influences markedly all the body systems with lasting results.

The technique was developed by an Australian, Tom Bowen, but the technique is also well known and practiced internationally with both people and animals.



# Bowen Therapy

## How can Bowen therapy help dogs?

Bowen Therapy stimulates the soft tissue, loosens and separates the fibres, increases hydration and metabolic function to all soft tissue. Bowen increases circulatory and lymphatic flow; stimulates neural pathways and works closely with the meridian and acupuncture systems. When you know where to put your hands and where to apply the moves the subtle energy systems come alive and work synergistically with the physical systems of the body. Bowen can help with a range of muscular-skeletal problems, assist with injury recuperation and with immune disease processes. Bowen has also been successful with animals that have poor eating habits, anxiety, performance stress, breathing problems, hormonal disorders and skin conditions.

***“Bowen Therapy is not meant to be a replacement for veterinary care, but rather as an adjunct to it, and it is important in the case of lameness and particularly acute and sudden change in physical conditions that a veterinary assessment is obtained.”***

There really is very little that Bowen Therapy cannot make a positive impression on, as the technique can be applied to most acute or chronic complaints, is safe to use on newborns and elderly and can promote often rapid healing at a deep cellular level, all with lasting results.

## What does a normal session involve?

It is the correct selection and sequencing of the moves, based on presenting problems that is important in achieving the best outcome for the dog. Physical observation of a dog's gait and movement, as well as palpation and assessment of joint range of motion and gathering of information about the dog's medical history, activity level, training /performance schedule, are all considered before determining the type, location, timing and sequencing of the Bowen moves.

A Bowen treatment can vary from 10 to 40 minutes, depending on presenting problems. There can be short rest periods between moves to cater for the animal's temperament and these short rest breaks (a few minutes) are also required after some moves to allow the body and tissue to respond.



In remedial (acute) situations, only a few Bowen moves may be done, with rests and then moves repeated. The stimulation of the fascia in turns stimulates neural pathways for healing. Holistic treatments often involve moves, placed in what might appear to be, random locations across the body, but these locations often coincide with acupoints or fascial pathways in the body. Bowen can be applied very softly or with equal effect, quite firmly. The speed and depth of application is often dictated by the sensitivities the animal is exhibiting and as it will be the therapists desire to work with the animal at all times, they may adjust the pressure to accommodate the need. A Bowen treatment is usually not painful or invasive and produces a generally relaxing feeling.

Improvement often becomes evident in the first or second treatment, particularly with acute muscular-skeletal problems. Depending on how chronic the condition is, more treatments may be needed and/or a maintenance therapy program designed following initial treatment. Older dogs, with general mobility problems, may benefit from a maintenance program where they receive Bowen around every 6 weeks. This maintains their mobility and overall sense of general wellbeing.

For performance dogs competing in sports like herding, agility and flyball, Bowen Therapy can be part of a preventative program to maintain joint flexibility and muscle subtleness. The frequency of the treatments varies depending on the dog's level of fitness, training and competing regime.



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### Qualified therapists

By using only Canine Bowen therapists you are assured that they have met all professional standards to practice, which includes a thorough understanding/knowledge of canine anatomy and physiology along with the unique application of Bowen techniques to canine structure. Therapists are also held accountable in meeting a professional code of practice, maintaining ethical standards and providing evidence of clinical practice and ongoing education. Currently in NSW there are only a few qualified Canine Bowen therapists. The Bowen Therapist Federation of Australia (BTFA), International Institute of Complementary Therapists (IICT) and the Bowen Association of Australia are the three professional organisations that will register qualified animal Bowen therapists.

### Bowen therapy... can anyone learn this technique?

Smart Bowen College [www.smartbowen.com](http://www.smartbowen.com) provides both professional and home user programs. The 2 day Essential/Home user program can equip the owner, trainer, handler with a good set of skills to assist in canine health and wellbeing. These programs are regularly run at Bringelly, in Sydney, NSW and throughout Australia. Professional training continues on from this two day Essentials program.

### Case Study 1 'Bella' ...a kick start to life!

Bella was the runt of the litter and was having difficulty thriving. Chest and respiratory infections were also making life difficult for Bella. The Bowen technique is well documented for its benefits for people with asthma and respiratory problems. These techniques can also be applied to animals.

Short 3 minute sessions were done with Bella, using Bowen therapy, from 3 weeks of age. Only a few moves were initially used with rest periods between the moves.

The sessions were performed every 3 days initially and the breeder shown how to complete one of the moves on a daily basis and as needed. Within 24 hours of the sessions Bella would pick up emotionally and physically. The moves were aimed to improve lymphatic drainage in the body and to improve the functioning of the immune system.

Bella continued to grow and at 6 weeks of age, Bowen was only done every 7-10 days, with more moves incorporated into the treatment. Bowen ceased at 12 weeks of age, when Bella was thriving and doing well. Four years on, Bella is a much loved family pet and doing very well.

*Opposite page: Applying Bowen Therapy*

*Pictured below: Bella, as a puppy, during her initial first treatments*



### What does a Vet have to say about Bowen Therapy?

I have been really impressed with the results I have achieved and consider Bowen Therapy to be the most effective form of physical therapy I have encountered. For small animal lameness, such as elbow, shoulder, OCD, stifle and hock arthritis, hip dysplasia and back problems, Bowen Therapy is able to release tight muscles and trigger points. Although I still perform a lot of acupuncture, for me Bowen Therapy has been so successful that it now comprises 80% of my practice.

**Bunbury WA (Felicity Harradine BVsc MVS MACVSc IVAS certificate)**  
[www.smartbowen.com/testimonials.php](http://www.smartbowen.com/testimonials.php)



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### Case Study 2 - 'Riley' Intervertebral Disc Disease

In December 2010, Riley, a German Shepherd Dog, suddenly went quite wobbly on his hind legs and then, very quickly deteriorated, until he had no movement at all and was incontinent.

Riley was diagnosed with Intervertebral Disc Disease and was hospitalised and placed on cortisone with surgical intervention recommended.

The owners could not afford the cost of the surgery and wanted to try some other approaches to see if improvement could be obtained. The only way Riley could walk was to put a towel under him and lift his back legs off the ground, to allow him to move around on his front legs. Veterinary prognosis without surgery was not good.

Riley received his first Bowen treatment with veterinary endorsement, one week after the injury occurred. In Bowen therapy there are some specific spinal moves that are recommended for these conditions and these were initially applied to Riley. The moves were applied with Riley lying down. Both people and dogs seem to have the most reactions to Bowen after the first treatment. They may be more lethargic initially, drink more, or have loose stools. The Bowen treatment can take up to 4-7 days to take effect.

Four days after the first treatment, Riley was standing on all four legs, wobbly, but standing. This was indeed a positive sign for recovery. Three Bowen treatments 5-7 days apart were performed with Riley, each time some new moves added into the treatment, which reflected the progress he was making. The Bowen treatments were then placed further apart and by the 8th week, post injury, Riley was moving around much better and starting to trot and run around the backyard. His incontinence had improved greatly, his mood and expression much better.

Some months on, he resumed much of his normal movement, no incontinence, with the only exception that he did not have full function of his tail. He can however, lift and wag his tail, but his tail carriage is not as elevated as pre injury. Bowen therapy ceased with Riley at around 3 months post injury. Five years on, Riley goes for regular walks and has not had any further incidents of Intervertebral disc disease. He continues to have a good quality of life.

*Pictured right: Riley, post treatment*



### Bowen.... the gentle, yet powerful modality.

**Helen Anderson**  
**Animal Equilibrium - Promoting Health, Wellness & Performance with Natural Therapies**  
[www.animalequil.com](http://www.animalequil.com)

B.AppSc; Grad Dip Hlth Ed; M.Ed; Dip Equine & Human Bowen Therapy ; Cert 1V Canine/Small Animal Bowen Therapy; Cert IV Kinesiology & Neural Organisation Technique certified; Cert Small Animal Nutrition (NCTM); Dip Animal Homeopathy(BIH) . Dip Biochemic Therapy; Animal Reiki Practitioner Level 111.

Helen has been involved in the breeding, showing and trialling of dogs for just on thirty years and a member of Dogs NSW during that period. Helen's business, Animal Equilibrium, provides a range of natural therapies for animals and Helen herself is a qualified human, canine and equine Bowen Therapist. She is also the NSW Instructor for the Canine and Equine program for Smart Bowen International Training College.

You can learn more about her services and training programs via her website: [www.animalequil.com](http://www.animalequil.com)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AnimalEquilibrium>

