

Does the length of a session matter in Bowen?

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Bowen Therapy

If you've ever had a massage, you've probably paid for an hour long session, or maybe you had a 90 minute extended bliss-session, or a short and snappy 30 minute session. Either way, you paid by the hour. It's something we're used to.

Bowen therapy is different. In Bowen, the length of a session is not regulated by the clock; instead each session is tailored to you, your body as it presents on the day, and to how you respond to treatment. If we need to cut a treatment short (e.g. if you are showing signs of being overloaded) we will. Likewise if we need to extend the time on the table, we'll do that too.

Bowen uses a "*Less is More*" philosophy, where as Bowen therapists, we strive to do the least amount of work for maximum effect. Your body knows how to heal; Bowen therapy just gives it a nudge in the right direction.

If you've ever had Bowen therapy, you'll be familiar with the delicate little moves applied with periods of resting time in between. Bowen is very minimal in its application, yet it has a powerful effect on the whole body. Very quickly, the body moves into a deeply relaxed state where healing can begin; and the individual muscles being worked on begin to relax; but there is more, much more, happening during a Bowen treatment. All stemming from such gentle minimal touch. (By the way, scientists are finding that the soft connective tissues of the body (known as fascia) respond better to gentle rolling movements (like those used in Bowen), than to the much harder pressure of say deep-tissue massage.)

The resting periods in between sets of Bowen moves are unique to Bowen too. During these "breaks", you are left lying on the table while your therapist often leaves the room. These breaks are an important part of the treatment, when much of the Bowen magic happens.

What's happening during this time? Muscles are relaxing, the fascia is reorganising its fibres, and blood is rushing into the tissues — creating the warmth that people often feel during a Bowen treatment. More blood flow is great. More blood means more healing; and that's why we're here after all.

These breaks are usually around 2 minutes (which is just enough time for your soft tissues to respond to the Bowen moves); although in some cases a longer time is needed for the process to complete (especially where your body has responded strongly to a Bowen move). If you can feel the effects of the treatment, we'll ask you for feedback on what's happening in your body and adjust the breaks accordingly too. If your body has stopped responding to the moves just performed, it's time for more Bowen; and if it's still processing, we usually wait a bit longer. Can you see now how the exact same moves might take 7 minutes for you, and 15 minutes for someone else? Stopping a session because the time is up, doesn't make sense.

In fact, some people are so sensitive, that they don't need much Bowen at all to see the positive effects we're looking for. For example, if a client comes in with fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, or Parkinson's, we would be very careful not to overload the body. We'd work very gently and slowly, leaving longer breaks; all the time looking carefully for signs that their body has had enough that day. We might even do the first couple of Bowen moves and nothing more. It all depends on the person and how they respond that day.

But even where these severe conditions don't exist, a longer treatment is not necessarily better than a shorter one. What's more important is for therapists to find the muscle spasms that are causing symptoms, and to release them. This may take 5 minutes, or it may take 50. It will be different each time.

Fixed session lengths simply don't make sense for Bowen. A Bowen therapist needs to adjust the treatment as it unfolds, leaving longer breaks if necessary, perhaps changing strategies if unexpected muscle tension is discovered during the session, and even stopping completely if the client's body has had enough for the day. This is why one session might be 40 minutes long and the next just 20. It all depends what your body needs each time.