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Alternative therapy shows promise for faster and more complete healing from concussions

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Nathan White has been symptom-free for three months since receiving Bowen Therapy for his concussions.



Concussions have become a significant and growing problem in lacrosse and other sports, at the youth, amateur and professional levels. Players who have concussions suffer from a range of symptoms including headaches, dizziness, nausea and irritability. They can have trouble focusing their mind and often find it difficult to interact with others. It is a frustrating and hopeless feeling, and there is little that the medical establishment can do to help. Most players are told they have to just wait until the symptoms go away. This can be a matter of days, weeks or much longer. But an alternative treatment offers the hope of allowing players to return to the field and, more importantly, to their normal lives, sometimes in a single treatment. After the jump, read the remarkable story of this therapy and what it could mean to players suffering from the traumatic aftermath of concussions.

Bowen Therapy is not well known or understood. It was invented by **Tom Bowen** in Australia sometime in the 1940s but didn't make its way to North American until 1989, according to a history of the treatment on the [Bowen Therapy International web site](#). The therapy itself consists of a series of moves in which the practitioner uses their thumb and fingers to roll across muscles and connective tissues. No one seems to be able to give a complete scientific explanation of how it works, but there is ample anecdotal and clinical evidence that it does.

In fact, results achieved through Bowen Therapy can seem almost miraculous; they are often immediate or nearly so and they are long-term. The miraculous nature of the results could actually be a barrier to widespread acceptance, given humans' sceptical nature and mistrust of things that seem too good to be true. But get ready to put your scepticism aside, because what follows is the story of one lacrosse player who recovered from multiple concussions with two one-hour Bowen treatments and who remains symptom-free months later.

Nathan White is a promising box and field player from Peterborough, Ontario. He has won Under-16 and Under-19 national field championships with Team Ontario and has played parts of two seasons with the Junior Lakers. White has scored 21 goals and 10 assists in 22 career games in junior. The reason he's played so few games is he has suffered three concussions in the past two years. The first one happened when he was pushed from behind and wound up getting hit in the head with an elbow. The opponent who hit him was a friend from field lacrosse, and White says it wasn't intentional, but that didn't make any difference to his symptoms. He suffered headaches, nausea and trouble thinking, and he says it "felt like I had a real tight hat on all the time."

White says, "I was always taught not to lay on the floor or ice cause it shows you're hurt. That was the very first time I actually lay on the floor. I was still dazed and confused. I was really worried cause I just knew something was wrong."

He began to feel better eventually and returned to playing. As is so often the case with head injuries, he didn't realize until afterwards that it was too early. Shortly after his return he dodged to the net, dove through the crease and hit his head on the floor when he landed. The symptoms returned and stayed longer this time.

This summer White returned to the Lakers and played eight games. In the final one, he was cutting down the middle at Peterborough's Memorial Centre "and as I shot someone came up with an elbow," he says.

This time the symptoms returned and weren't going away. White was finished for the season and had to watch his teammates as they made a strong playoff run, pushing the Orangeville Northmen to overtime of a seventh game in the OLA semi-finals. He says the "tight-hat" feeling remained and he had trouble thinking clearly, even six weeks after the injury. "It's a real foggy feeling, nothing's really clear," White says. "It's just foggy. That goes with emotions and everything, you're not really sure how you feel." He says that he felt the fogginess all the time right after the concussion and then on and off afterwards. "My feelings were as if I was in a snowstorm, i was very uncertain what was next, how i was gonna feel, what was gonna tick me off, what was gonna make me upset, what was gonna happen with lacrosse. It made everything seem so much more overwhelming."

White's treatment arose because of a happy accident. I have a friend who is a registered Herbalist. I knew she did Bowen Therapy but I didn't really know much about it. Then I saw a Facebook status she had posted, saying how it was gratifying to have treated another concussion patient who got off the table after one treatment with all his symptoms resolved, but that it didn't do much for repeat business.

I had [written about the problem of concussions in lacrosse earlier in the year](#), when **Merrick Thompson** announced his retirement because of head injury issues. When I saw the Facebook post I almost immediately called my friend, **Marianne Beacon**, to talk about it.

Beacon explained the process and gave me a treatment to help with my neck, with which I'd been having trouble since a car accident several weeks earlier. After the treatment, as I was driving home, I turned my head to shoulder check when changing lanes. I was stunned by how freely and how far my head was able to turn. I knew that I wanted to get someone in to be treated by her for concussions, because I sensed how huge the implications were for treating athletes.

I had heard about White's concussion problems, although they were always discussed in hushed tones and no one was really comfortable talking about it. It's not something that people in sports *want* to talk about. Head injuries are really scary because you can't just go to physio or have surgery and get better. The only approach western medicine really offers is rest, and plenty of it. **Tracey Kelusky** talked for my previous story about having to avoid using the computer and how he basically missed several months of his young son's early life because he wasn't really there. **Ken Montour** was still not playing a year and a half after suffering a major concussion. More importantly, he hadn't been able to return to work as an

education assistant with special needs children.

If there was something that could help, I wanted to find out about it and spread the word. I contacted White through the Lakers coaching staff and met with him to talk about the treatment and see if he would be interested in trying it. He and his parents were game, so I put them in touch with Beacon. White went to Beacon's clinic, located just a couple of lacrosse floors' lengths away from the Memorial Centre, for his first treatment.

In the first session Beacon speaks with the client to learn what issues they are having and determine the course of treatment. Approaches have been developed for dealing with concussions, but she wants to know about an individual's issues to tailor treatment precisely. White then laid down on a massage-type table, fully clothed, and Beacon proceeded to do Bowen moves on him. The process involves gentle rolls across soft tissue—muscle, connective tissues and fascia. Beacon performs just three or four moves which could be described as similar to plucking a guitar string and then pauses for two minutes.

The pause is a critical element of the therapy, she explains. Bowen works in a similar way to the communication of the nervous system. It works with the brain. Beacon says the therapist is basically convincing the brain to heal the body, not forcing either brain or body to do anything. Because the brain works on a feedback loop, giving it more than four commands at once can overwhelm it and cause it to skip some and only complete others. Therefore, the system only works when the two-minute pauses are included between each set of moves. An entire session lasts about an hour.

After the first treatment, White said he noticed that the tightness in his head was gone, but he felt like he dwelt on what would happen. "I was thinking about it too much, worrying will it work will it work." He returned for a second treatment a couple of weeks later, after which "it was like night and day. I didn't dwell I just let it be and it was better right away. No tightness in my head and everything was pretty clear and I wasn't irritated. I noticed that right away, and then a week into it I realized it was really working, that it wasn't just a quick fix."

The second treatment was August 2, more than three months ago, and White continues to be symptom-free. In that time he has helped Ontario to the national Under-19 field gold medal and has felt good while running and lifting weights. He started school at Sir Sandford Fleming College to upgrade and will be heading to Onondaga Community College for two years starting in January.

After that, he has committed to attend Stony Brook University on Long Island, NY, on a lacrosse scholarship. Being concussion-free is a huge weight off his mind, and he is feeling confident about the future. White is happy to feel like he has his life back, and he is looking forward to playing lacrosse again, instead of worrying that he may never be the player he believes he has the potential to be.

Beacon says Bowen therapy is so effective because it "reminds the body how to heal." She says she has had patients call to say they want to come in for a follow-up treatment but then call back to say they don't need it because everything is fine again. With a little help to unlock tensions, the brain and body can remember their innate capacity to heal.

It's unclear what will happen with subsequent concussions after Bowen therapy, as it is with anyone who recovers and then suffers another blow to the head. Beacon says, though, that she encourages clients to call immediately if they do suffer another head trauma so she can treat it within 24 hours. Addressing it quickly makes a huge difference.

The therapy is, of course, not just for concussions. Beacon has unlocked frozen shoulders and seen a woman with postpartum pain who was taking a bottle of Tylenol per week reduce her intake to just five tablets per week and then eventually to none. The key is that Bowen speeds the healing process and creates a more complete healing.

Beacon is also quick to point out that the Facebook post that led to this story was posted with tongue in cheek. While someone who requires only a single session after a concussion really isn't great for repeat business, Beacon is a healer. She considers someone who comes in for a treatment or two and doesn't need to come back a success story. Not all cases resolve this quickly. Concussions that have been lingering for a longer time tend to need more treatment. There are also other conditions that require more attention. Remarkably, often issues that have been the most difficult to treat traditionally will see results in a relatively short time.

She is hoping that word of Bowen Therapy will spread, partly from a business perspective but primarily because she knows there are thousands of people whose lives could be improved if they received the treatment. Beacon primarily practices in Peterborough and offers treatments one day per week in Toronto.

Nathan White's story is just one example of a person making a full and lasting recovery, but it provides hope that Bowen Therapy could prove to be a revolutionary approach to dealing with concussions in the sports world.

