

## **Clare East's Physiotherapy Patient's Blog** **Blog 1 following appointment Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2006**

I've never written one of these before but was very excited that a health care practitioner was so interested in my point of view about my treatment. As I have found in the last seven years of pain following a spinal accident, this is a real rarity.

It was highly recommended that I pay Rachael a visit after Helen, my mother in law who suffers from a rare condition, had been given the details by a friend. She was elated following her first appointment and has since been heard telling anyone who will listen how she can wiggle her big toes for the first time since last September, after only three sessions! She was so pleased with the results and the holistic and warm approach to physiotherapy that she experienced, she even offered to pay for the first session for my birthday present.

Speaking to Rachael on the phone to make an appointment, I was aware of the professional and friendly way arrangements were made. She was very accommodating when trying to decide whether a home or practise appointment would be better for me due to stairs and also meeting on a Friday after a tough week in the classroom.

At first I was unsure of receiving treatment in someone's home and will admit I was a little bit nervous before my visit but Rachael's hospitable welcome soon put my mind at rest. On arrival we went to sit outside in the garden which was lovely on a sunny day and especially following a hard week at work. The delicious ginger beer with a fresh strawberry in it and bowl of healthy snacks was another touch that really helped to put me at ease and in exactly the right frame of mind to begin the initial consultation. This consisted of half an hour of an informal style discussion about nearly every area of my life including what I eat and what shoes I wear! I felt that Rachael's style of gathering the necessary background to my situation was refreshingly patient led. She took professional notes based on my train of thought as I was guided by knowledgeable questioning and advice which I made lots of notes about.

After the initial consultation I felt that Rachael's wealth of subject knowledge gave her an excellent understanding of my situation and the pain I experience and for the first time I had a real insight into why I feel the way I do and what I can do to help myself. I was particularly interested in the numerous images she gave me to picture in my mind to help me to understand complex physiological examples.

In my practice as a primary school teacher, I am really interested in the importance of being aware of VAKOG learning styles and preferences and how these affect people's experiences and memories. These Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Olfactory and Gustatory preferences are how people interpret reality by means of a favourite or preferred sensory channel or combination of channels. I was immediately aware of Rachael's vast knowledge in this area and how every aspect of the consultation so far had somehow been linked to these. From sitting in the sunshine, the food and drink, her amazingly relaxing and comforting Irish lilt and infectious giggle (noted too by my mother in law who said she could listen to her all day), to the visual imagery and hands on physical examples, I think that she pretty much had all the bases covered!

The next hour of the session was done on the floor on a fabulous soft mat with a triangle wedge that supports your knees (I must remember next session to ask her

where I can get one). This part took on the more familiar style of a physiotherapy session involving movements and exercises to do at home. These were all explained in a concise and easily understandable way with more visual imagery to support them.

Rachael was knowledgeable at all times in a comforting and relaxing style that I have not come across in my previous dealings with the NHS! She was verbally supportive and encouraging during some of the tougher parts with the manner of a kind yet determined gym instructor! I really enjoyed myself and felt a great sense of achievement following the session. I was shown the correct way to get up from the floor and was aching all over but in that satisfying “I’ve just had a workout” kind of way. Rachael was very aware of my pain levels at all times and did everything she could to prevent unnecessary pain and gave me pointers all the way through of how I could improve.

Following the time on the floor, I was given the opportunity to make any notes from discussions during the session and Rachael answered any questions I had over a well earned cup of Ayurvedic sweet chilli tea, delicious.

The next day my head was buzzing with excitement from the session the day before but I did not feel over faced at all which I thought I might. This was because I was encouraged to make notes all the way through and was advised to only focus on three of the areas we discussed for the coming week. One of these was particularly exciting as it involved buying new shoes to help with my posture. Anyone who advises me to buy new shoes is a winner in my books!

In the week that has followed I have seen a marked improvement in my exercises, have managed to engage those pelvic floor and other thingy muscles that I thought would take me forever to do, have been swimming and walked home from work three times which was my target. I feel great and am really looking forward to the next session with Rachael so that I can show off to her the progress I have already made. It’s just a pity that she only recommends six sessions!

## **Clare East’s Physiotherapy Patient’s Blog** **Blog 2 following appointment Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2006**

No nerves at all today. I was really looking forward to the appointment with Rachael and couldn’t wait to let her know how I’ve been getting on. There were more lovely drinks on arrival and another informal chat, (really a ramble from me) about how I’ve been getting on. The new shoes have already been working wonders and I’ve been doing really well with my exercises. It was so nice to be able to discuss my progress and Rachael led the conversation again with excellent questioning and in a calm, patient and praising manner.

Much more exercise work today, very hands on and with loads of fantastic tips to prevent myself from having a huge flare up. Again, Rachael gave me lots of visual analogies to help me to understand my pain and what to do when it gets really bad. Rachael’s caring yet forceful encouragement was ideal and I came away from the session feeling like I’d worked hard and could tackle anything!

More delicious, cold drinks as we finished. Rachael was very helpful in getting me to record everything that we had discussed to give me a manageable plan for aims for the next week.

I came away from the session feeling like I had a map to my situation and all the questions I'd had for years were finally getting answered. Even some problems I did not know were related to my back, for instance my migraines, were explained to me in a professional and knowledgeable way. She is definitely well versed in her field and gives you a real sense of calm over your situation and how it can be resolved. It's like when you finally realise that roads you've been down the top and bottom of actually meet in the middle to form the same road!!! Maybe I should leave the visual images to Rachael but all I know is that I feel great.

## **Clare East's Physiotherapy Patient's Blog** **Blog 3 following appointment Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2006**

The day after last week's appointment I was in agony but that wore off after a day or two. It was more like the pain after a good workout with a bit of spinal trouble mixed in rather than danger, scary, I've done something wrong, PAIN!

My migraines have also been a lot worse, well everyday actually but Rachael told me that the frequency or intensity might increase with my new neck stretching exercises. I thought this might happen as pacing is definitely an area I need to develop, it's all or nothing with me, which in the long run doesn't help too much. Rachael in her wisdom helped me to realise this too and I'm going to take her advice next week (promise). It's just so hard not to throw yourself into things too strongly when you're so desperate to feel better.

When I arrived today for my appointment, after a friendly and relaxing chat, Rachael asked me how I'd been which was just what I needed. She reassured me that my symptoms were normal and instructed me to only carry out my neck stretches every other day. She also said that it would be helpful to both of us if I write a migraine diary of frequency and intensity over the next week.

Lovely freshly brewed Jasmine tea and treats from a treats tin helped me to unwind after a hard days work too and the quick chat before my session was great before the physical work began. Rachael really senses that I am a hands-on kind of learner and that I really benefit from practical examples of what to do to ease my situation. Today we worked on my standing and walking with some new stretches and relaxation. Fantastic!

When I first came home, I was a bit upset about the fact that so much more of my body and actions are affected by my back problem than I had admitted to myself, for example my knees, hands and neck. After a little while of coming to terms with it and a bit of positive self talk (recommended by Rachael), I was extremely grateful of her extensive physiological knowledge in highlighting these and pointing me in the right direction to helping myself.

So far this week I've taken things a lot easier, been swimming again which was great, been walking a lot more which is getting easier and have also been following Rachael's recommendations on how to relax in a comfortable and physically beneficial way. I don't want to tempt fate but I've had nothing to write in my migraine diary yet after some fantastic neck work during my session and have been applying regular ice packs to ease pain and sooth inflammation. A personal recommendation and challenge for the week is linked with the locality of my coccyx pain and could involve a frozen carrot! Use your imagination but not for too long...please. I'll try that at the weekend when I've got a bit more time on my hands.....

## **Clare East's Physiotherapy Patient's Blog** **Blog 4 following appointment Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2006**

This weeks session was amazing, I think you already know by now all about the lovely drinks and chats each session begins with so I'll get right on with the session. The informal chat was short today as Rachael had my blog to read and also she wanted to do a lot of hands on work, which suited me, so we got cracking straight away (not literally, she's not some scary chiropractor).

We started off with a lovely foot massage with gorgeous smelling avocado body butter which helped to immediately relax me and put me in a good mood. There's nothing like a foot rub for hot tired feet after I'd been on them all day at work! The purpose wasn't only to make me feel nice though, Rachael expertly detected from my feet, areas of weakness, pain and cramp and after working on these I did some random exercise involving sliding a tissue or page from a magazine with my feet. Rachael's random exercise regime number 25! I don't know where she gets them all but they're great, she really should write a book on them one day.

I then did some back and side bends to give Rachael an idea of my range of movements, she marked on my body how far I could get and we repeated these at the end of the session after stretches and manipulation. I was amazed at the difference and it gave me something that was easily quantifiable to measure my progress. To say I was chuffed would be an understatement.

Very carefully with constant pain descriptions and monitoring of pain scores along the way I attempted to lie on my front with my head and chest up. I was very nervous at first as this is the exact position that tends to cause extreme pain and I had been advised against doing it by my consultant and osteopath. I was so pleased when I could actually do it comfortably for a short period of time following Rachael's careful, expert instructions.

We then went on to some exploratory work of my spine for Rachael to get an even clearer picture of exactly where my main roots of pain lie. This was very painful at first but Rachael kept stopping and asking me to locate, describe and score the pain. This really reassured me and I felt confident at all times that she was highly skilled in her field. I couldn't believe that after seven years of constant pain and seeing many consultants, physiotherapists and such like that nobody had ever done this before. Wow what a relief that finally someone seems to be helping me to get to the bottom of all this. I can't express enough how highly I would recommend her to anyone who is suffering in a similar situation (she's not paid me to say that honest ...it's true).

After such an amazing session I've been a bit disappointed with myself, I have hardly had time to fit in my exercises and I'm really feeling that now. I'm not going to beat myself up about it though as every week can't be perfect and it would be unnatural for me to think so. In a way it has helped me to not do them regularly as I can see even more now how beneficial they are to my day to day functioning. I'm definitely not going to make a habit of it though and next week it should be a less manic one for me so it will all hopefully slip back into place. On a positive note though the manic week has meant a lot more walking for me so that's got to be a good thing. I have done my feet ones too and I can feel them getting stronger. Oh and I've managed to still get to the pool to swim and walk so all in all I've actually achieved more than I thought. Will need to make more of an effort to fit twenty minutes into each day to do the exercises and with the manic life of a school teacher's term nearly over and summer hols starting next week I'm sure I'll be fine.