

Clare East's Physiotherapy Patient's Blog **Blog 5 following appointment Thursday 27th July 2006**

As I'm sitting down to write this blog about my last session, I have to think back long and hard as it was nearly a month ago now! It's not that I've been slacking off but instead I've been travelling around Iceland! Finally, with the help of the physiotherapy treatment and of course Rachael, additional treatment from my osteopath and the last few months of hard work, I managed to take the trip I've been dreaming of for the past 3 years. I've been backpacking and camping around Iceland which was absolutely amazing. Really tough going at times but well worth it, a real achievement and I feel very proud of myself. My husband is delighted with my progress too as I climbed a volcano (on my hands and knees but I got to the top all the same) and went walking up hills using climbing poles. I also managed to carry a backpack with the help of engaging those TVA muscles that Rachael loves to work so hard on me!

As always, Rachael is very aware of the whole picture when dealing with a person and their pain. I was delighted when I turned up to the last session (feeling very frazzled at the end of term with one day to go) and she said that we would go through some stretches and exercises that I could do while I was away. These would both prevent me from getting too sore and having a flare up and would also help to stretch it out at the end of each day after all the walking. The geothermal heated pools helped a lot too.

I felt as though Rachael had been listening and taking everything in when I was talking about my trip and this made me feel extremely valued and understood as a patient. She suggested ways to alleviate the pain by using little devices such as cushions or bringing a pillow case to put jumpers in to create a makeshift pillow to put under my knees at night. We discussed comfort levels especially as I was going to be camping and sleeping on the ground (something I would never have thought possible until now and even then I was still worried).

All of the tips and exercises that Rachael suggested were excellent and extremely practical. They worked very well as she was aware that I would have to do them in a small tent on a narrow travel mattress or while I was walking around. I don't think I would have been able to get through the trip without her help, support, guidance and practical advice. I could always hear her voice in my head when I was going through the exercises. She has also given me the confidence over the last few months to go ahead with the trip in the first place and I am very grateful to her for this. I DID IT!!

Am looking forward to my next session in a couple of hours as my body really needs it now but I don't feel half as bad as I thought I would. My husband and I have even started planning our next backpacking trip for next summer. There's no stopping me now. With sensible pacing, 1 tough day followed by 1 easy day, not overdoing it but setting realistic challenges and taking time out to do my exercises, the world's my oyster. It's not I CAN'T but I CAN TRY.....

Clare East's Physiotherapy Patient's Blog **Blog 6 following appointment Tuesday 22nd August 2006**

Well no time for physiotherapy exercises or physical work last session! Had a very much needed but unexpected tearful counselling session with Rachael for nearly an hour and a half! I hadn't realised it but I came down to earth after the trip with a bit of

a bump. This bump involved worries about being physically and mentally prepared for going back to work in September. I'd enjoyed such an amazing sense of freedom from some of my symptoms while I was away and was disappointed to find that they had returned when I got back. After lots of talking with Rachael (and lots of tears and snots too...), I came to the realisation that some of my symptoms are very much linked to mental stress. The thoughts build up and manifest themselves as the physical pains that already have pain pathways fully opened for them without necessarily anything being wrong. My brain has just got so used to sending these messages that when I'm stressed it goes into overload.

Rachael had such a sympathetic and compassionate ear, I managed to figure most of it out for myself. Physiotherapy and excellent counselling skills, well I guess until now I hadn't realised that the two would go hand in hand but now I know if you're going to look at the whole person, as Rachael does, then the brain sometimes needs a bit of work too.

Clare East's Physiotherapy Patient's Blog **Blog 7 following appointment Friday 25th August 2006**

Wow, what a session! This was my 6th session following my initial consultation and Rachael likes to review all her clients after 6 sessions which is an excellent way for me, the patient to see how far I've come and also for Rachael to note the patient's progress and where they need to go next. She suggested that this session should be an all over body massage which would help to relax my mind and body, especially after the tearful session on Tuesday! I felt amazing at the time and for the next couple of days I was walking on a cloud. (I even stayed out until 1am on that Friday night without having to go home early because I was in pain).

During the massage, Rachael used the strokes and pressure as a tool to investigate muscle tone and flexibility and I was amazed at how much I have improved since coming to see her. My range of flexibility, the *bounce-back-ability* of my spine and the strength of my muscles are definitely improving and if I carry on like this I'll be dancing around in no time.

Following this session, I have been reflecting on my progress quite a bit and have decided to carry on seeing Rachael so I've booked in for another 6 sessions. I am hoping to really step up my physical activity to overcome this condition myself with Rachael's expertise on the right exercises to do to work certain muscle groups which help to alleviate pain in certain areas.

These last few months have been really tough for me as I've had to make big physical changes and these in turn mean big mental and emotional changes too. Looking back on this I feel really proud of how far I've come. It's been a bit like a roller coaster, going up and down, around and around, getting higher as it reaches the top. I'm on my way to the top with Rachael's help, a lot of determination and a healthy and positive attitude *most* of the time. I've also learnt to look after my mind as well, in particular my stress levels and how these affect me physically.

All I can say now is bring on the next set of exercises I'm ready for them and if every 6th session could be an all over body massage that would suit me down to the ground....

Clare East's Physiotherapy Patient's Blog **Blog 8 following appointment Tuesday 26th September 2006**

What an amazing session. Following the op on Monday I went to see Rachael the next day still feeling very sore and a little worse for wear! I nearly phoned to cancel the appointment as I was far too comfortable on the sofa at home but realised that if I was going to get myself back to work by the end of the week, I needed to get moving. I'm really glad I did. I knew when I booked the session that Rachael would be able to give me lots of advice and support after the op but I wasn't expecting an hour long reiki healing session, which was fantastic. Is there anything that women can't do?

I've only had one experience of reiki before and to be honest probably wouldn't have had another one. It wasn't unpleasant or horrific or anything but I didn't feel that it really did anything. I like to think of myself as fairly open minded about new ideas and after suffering from chronic pain for 8 years you'd probably howl at the moon if someone told you that you might feel some benefit so I did go into it the first time with an open mind but I felt rushed and hadn't built a relationship with the reiki healer so the whole thing felt very impersonal. It was in complete contrast to Tuesday's reiki session with Rachael.

I've been sat here trying to explain it for about half an hour and still am not really sure how to describe it but I felt that my nerves had been cleansed and my energy flushed out and reinvigorated..... If that makes any sense? As Rachael was doing the reiki (if that's the right phrase), I felt very hot where her hands were and found it extremely relaxing to concentrate on my breath and breathing for so long, in a similar way to meditation. All the way through she gave me amazing visualisation exercises focusing on energy and the nerves so that by the time the session was over I felt as though I had been asleep for a week! I think that the fact I was warm and comfortable, at ease with Rachael and she explained the theory behind it I was ready to trust her completely and go with it.

I feel as though some kind of energy channels have been opened up. I was out last night telling my friend all about the session and she told me that she also did reiki (something that I didn't know). She put her hands above my pain right in the middle of the pub and I felt that tremendous heat again. I still can't really explain it but it has definitely triggered something and I'd be up for another session of reiki the next time I'm feeling a bit jangled.

Needless to say when I did get home after the session I felt energised, drank loads of water and had the first 9 hours of great sleep I've had in a long time.