



## *Research: “What can the Bowen Technique mean for people with Scleroderma”*

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*“The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but instead will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet, and the causes and prevention of disease.”*

*Thomas Edison*

*BNatural Bowen Therapy  
Marijke Schroot-Kortenoeven  
February-2013*

This paper describes the influence of the Bowen Technique for patients with Scleroderma, based on an essay of 14 scleroderma patients. Based on the results, it seems that the Bowen treatment has a real positive effect on the majority of the participants on emotional and physical level. In this paper the participants, i.e. scleroderma patients, are also appointed as clients.



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## **Acknowledgement**

It is quite difficult to write a paper about Scleroderma when you have the disease yourself.

As a patient, you know how it feels, the impact it has on your life and what it does to your body and mind and overtime, you learn how to deal with it and live with it.

As a therapist, you are trained to reduce the negative impacts to the body and mind, and learn to apply treatment to improve normal life. In my case, I am in the position to especially experience from both patient and therapist side the achievable results of the Bowen therapy. But at the end of the day, it is impossible to forget that I am a human being, a scleroderma patient who will always need medical treatment.

All these items played an important role in my essay. It remained a constant balancing act between being a patient and therapist but during the visits you are above all the therapist where I consistently needed to turn off my own situation as far as possible.

The road to complete this paper was long. To visit 14 people was very tiring, but rewarding.

I want to thank all the participants for their collaboration and their confidence in me. It was a privilege to meet you all and I wish you the best.

Without support of several people I could not have finished this path and therefore this paper.

First of all my husband, Harry, who supported me, motivated me, helped me to organize everything and he encouraged me to continue, when I had a bad moment.

Thank you so much, you mean the world to me and I love you with all my heart.

Thanks to Pamela Blatt, who reviewed my English. I learned a lot from her corrections.

Thank you Pamela for your time, enthusiasm and collaboration.

Thanks to Petra Verstappen, with whom I regularly practice and brainstorm about clients and treatment options.

Thank you Petra for listening to me and for your feedback.

I also want to thank my children and their partners, who supported me all the way with their criticism, enthusiasm and faith in me.

I love you all and you mean everything to me.

Finally I want to say thanks to Karel Aerssen, director of BowNed who gave me the chance to become a Bowen Therapist. He supported me, especially in the beginning when I was very insecure. He helped me and took care of me when I had a difficult time during the Bowen training days.

Thank you Karel, without you I would not have made this journey.

Marijke



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## **Summary**

This paper describes the influence of the Bowen Technique for patients with Scleroderma. This essay is based on the conducted study of 14 scleroderma patients. The results show that the Bowen treatment has a significant positive effect on the majority of the participants on both emotional and physical levels.



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## **Introduction**

### **Why this subject?**

In 2006 I was diagnosed with Scleroderma, a rare and incurable auto-immune disease. The impact of such a disease is enormous in your daily and social life. The Bowen Technique gave me the possibility to function again and made me aware of the opportunities to live with the disease (providing the relationship between connective tissue and Scleroderma resulting in an improved way of living)

Now I look back and know that there is a life with Scleroderma. I also think that I got this disease for a reason: to help people with the same disorder.

With my Bowen knowledge I hope to give them understanding of the possibilities to deal with the problems they are facing, the understanding of the self-healing ability of the body and not to forget, to recognize the signals the body sends and what to do with them.

Because of the major impact on one's life in general, this is especially of importance to be able to balance both social and professional working life aspects. With my own experience, I can help Scleroderma patients to reorganize their life and use the Bowen Technique to ease their pain and problems.



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## **What is the Bowen Technique?**

### **What is it?**

The Bowen Technique is a remedial, hands-on therapy that is applied using very gentle pressure. The practitioner uses thumbs and fingers on precise points of the body to perform Bowen's unique set of rolling-type moves which stimulate the muscles and soft tissue of the body. There is no manipulation or adjustment of hard tissue and no force used, which is of great importance for clients with Scleroderma.

The experience of a treatment is gentle, subtle and relaxing. It is believed that the Bowen Technique prompts the body to reset, repair and balance itself and clients report the experience of pain relief, improvement of function and recovery of energy.

### **Gentle**

As a therapy, Bowen is truly light-touch. The pressure used in Bowen is quite subtle and can be extremely gentle and still get the job done. It is not dependent on hard pressure and there is no awkward bending, twisting or re-positioning of the body during the treatment. Because of this, Bowen can be considered for clients for whom other forms of therapy might be too aggressive, forceful or invasive. For this reason, it is an applicable therapy for Scleroderma patients, who are very sensitive to touch.

The tiniest of babies through to the frailest of adults have been treated with Bowen.

### **Holistic**

A key element of the principle guiding Bowen, and indeed all complementary therapies, is that it works holistically, according to the well-established principle of naturopathic medicine: 'That the body be treated as a whole, without referral to named disease'. Indeed, Bowen does not diagnose and is not treating just the named disease or condition, but is treating the person as a whole.

### **Relevant**

The protocol of the Bowen Technique treatment encompasses the effects on the whole body. For instance, probably the most common presentation for a Bowen therapist will be back pain. With Bowen they will tend to give a whole-body treatment at the first visit, which includes the neck, knees and shoulders. Because it is often very difficult to be completely sure where any given pain is coming from and to know how other structures are being affected by the original problem, Bowen's holistic way of treating will most often get to the root of problems gently and efficiently.

Source: [www.thebowentechnique.com](http://www.thebowentechnique.com)

More information about the Bowen Technique can be found in appendix Bowen technique.



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## **Scleroderma?**

### **What is scleroderma?**

Scleroderma, or systemic sclerosis, is a chronic connective tissue disease generally classified as one of the auto-immune rheumatic diseases. The word "scleroderma" comes from two Greek words: "sclero" meaning hard, and "derma" meaning skin. Hardening of the skin is one of the most visible manifestations of the disease. The disease has been called "progressive systemic sclerosis," but the use of this term has been discouraged since it has been found that scleroderma is not necessarily progressive. The disease varies from patient-to-patient.

### **What scleroderma is not**

Scleroderma is not contagious, infectious, cancerous or malignant.

### **How serious is scleroderma?**

Any chronic disease can be serious. The symptoms of scleroderma vary greatly for each person, and the effects of scleroderma can range from very mild to life threatening. The seriousness will depend on the parts of the body, which are affected, and the extent to which they are affected. A mild case can become more serious if not properly treated. Prompt and proper diagnosis and treatment by qualified physicians may minimize the symptoms of scleroderma and reduce the chance for irreversible damage.

Scleroderma can affect organs such as the bowel, lungs and for instance eyes and mouth (very dry eyes and mouth). It is not just affecting the skin although the name Scleroderma suggests that this is the only problem.

People with Scleroderma are also faced with problems of stiffness and pain all over the body; they are often very tired and have problems with their hands and feet (related to Reynaud's syndrome).

### **How is scleroderma diagnosed?**

The first symptoms of Scleroderma can be problems with hands and feet (very cold, turning blue and very white and extremely painful). The hands will have wounds at their fingertips (and skin tears and healing takes a very long time). This is diagnosed as Reynaud's phenomenon (primary or secondary Reynaud's see appendix Reynaud).

The diagnostic process may require consultation with rheumatologists (arthritis specialists), and/or dermatologists (skin specialists) and require blood studies and numerous other specialized tests depending on which organs are affected.

Source: [www.scleroderma.org](http://www.scleroderma.org).

In daily life, it means Scleroderma makes your connective tissue\* rigid and creates stiffness. In essence, one feels as if they are in too small a jacket, which of course is very painful.

It also creates pain because of the tissue (=connective tissue\*) damage: a kind of scar tissue.





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The Scleroderma can influence the function of the connective tissue\*. When the stretching and massaging of muscles and skeleton stagnates, it creates a domino effect throughout the body. The pain can be everywhere and the stiffness is enormous.

The Bowen Technique focuses on releasing the tension of the connective tissue and the pain will subside and the flexibility will improve.

For instance, working on the Psoas Muscle, can make a huge difference for the client. Unfortunately it was not possible to do the Psoas Muscle procedure to all participating patients because of the powerful impact it has on people with Scleroderma.

It is important to gradually build-up the treatments and it is better to wait with the Psoas procedure until the 4th or 5th treatment, depending on their reactions. More information about Scleroderma and related conditions in the Appendix Scleroderma.

*\*It is the connective network, which synchronizes the motion between muscles, vessels, nerves and viscera as well as transferring muscle action to the bones. In this way, the movements of the muscles and skeleton are continually stretching and massaging the internal organs. The connective tissue also forms the fibrous bed for all the lymph vessels, blood vessels and nerves, supporting them and keeping them in their appropriate channels (Job's Body, page 87).*



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## **Case Study Approach**

To choose a subject for my case study was not very difficult. The impact of the Bowen Technique for me personally as a Scleroderma patient was enormous as it affects both emotional and physical layers.

Because the disease is very rare, the major problem was to find enough people with Scleroderma to participate in my study.

(1 in 10.000; women 3 x more often than men; manifestation of the disease between the ages of 30 to 50).

Fortunately, I was referred by the hospital of my own specialist to the NVLE, the Dutch Association for Lupus, APS, Scleroderma and MCTD.

They published an article on their website in which I asked people to participate in my case study.

The response was more than I had hoped for. In 2011, I had 12 people for my study and in 2012, 2 more people responded to my call.

I visited most of the participants at their home, using my own massage table.

Home treatments were for 3 consecutive weeks, one day a week and some participants returned for another 4<sup>th</sup> treatment at my practice. There are actually some participants who still come to me.

Due to the long driving distances, this period was a very busy and exhausting time, but also very emotional as it confronted me with myself and my own situation.

For the first time you meet with people who have the same disease and they hope desperately that you can help them. But it also gave me inside information about the differences between the participants and of course the similarities.

Before visiting, participants had to complete and return to me the questionnaire (see Appendix Questionnaire).

During my first visit (it took sometimes up to 2 hours) I walked through their answers and asked more questions.

I gave them a basic treatment (45 minutes) and they were requested to track effects weekly using the evaluation form (see Appendix Evaluations) allowing me to see if there were (or were not) progressive results.

They had to fill in the form during 3 weeks. The 4<sup>th</sup> week they sent me back the results.

Although the types of treatments ranged per person, some complaints were similar and I conducted certain procedures more frequently (TMJ, Kidney, diaphragm, pelvis).



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## **Expectations**

The Bowen Technique gave me my life back, in a way that I could function again and could be of significance for others. Therefore my experience made me hope for great results.

The expectations were difficult to judge. There are a lot of factors that play a role in success of the treatment (for example: the influence of stress, death of a loved one, not able to work anymore, depression, for how long someone has Scleroderma).

You don't know the people you are visiting nor their attitude towards dealing with Scleroderma. Everyone is different, every body is different and emotions play an important role.

I had an open mind and my goal was to help at least 50% of the participants.

- To help them with how to deal with Scleroderma; share their pain and listen to their problems and obstacles in life
- To give them more emotional and physical balance
- Reduce pain and stiffness
- To teach them to listen to their body
- To help them live their lives again.



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## Organization

### Duration of study

Finding people with Scleroderma is a great challenge as it is a rare auto-immune disease so finding the best set of participants was key to my research. Luckily with the help of the published article, the number of respondents was more than I could have hoped for. Therefore I was able to make a careful selection to ensure a thorough study could be conducted on what the Bowen Technique could mean for people with Scleroderma.

It cost more than 2 months to make appointments for treatments. Of course participants had other priorities and I also needed to balance my workload in my own practice so this made it very difficult to plan.

The study period was approximately 18 months, which was longer than I had anticipated in the beginning. I am extremely proud to have had the opportunity to meet these special people. I felt very honored that they trusted me enough to share their feelings and concerns.

### Planning

The participants lived in a circle of about 50 km. from my home. Good planning in terms of time and distance was therefore necessary.

The weekends were the most suitable time for these visits to be made.

I wanted to visit 5 people per weekend. On Saturday I visited 3 participants, Sunday I visited 2 participants. These visits took place during 3 consecutive weekends. The other clients were visited individually, because they lived quite a distance apart from each other. Some others preferred to visit me at home (at my practice) as they understood the impact that it had on me given my own situation.

Therefore, it took more time than anticipated to treat everyone which resulted in the study taking longer than initially planned.

### Questionnaires

All participants had to fill in a questionnaire covering various questions, for instance: (see Appendix Questionnaires)

#### Personal questions

- Profession
- Still working

#### Questions about Scleroderma, for instance:

- When officially diagnosed
- Which form of Scleroderma
- Reynaud's syndrome
- Questions about their past
- Traumatic experiences
- Stressful life?



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### Disease

- Information about their main complaints

### Dealing with Scleroderma

- Limitations
- Dependence on third parties
- Sport
- Social life

### Support from other disciplines

- Physiotherapist
- Social worker
- Occupational therapist

### Bowen treatments

- Expectations
- Most important 5 issues apply as a marker
- Intake of water

## Visits

9 of the 14 clients were treated 3 times, 1 time per week for 3 weeks. 2 clients were treated 5 times and 3 clients were treated for an extended period of time; 2 clients are still under treatment.

## Evaluation results

At the end of the visits, clients completed the evaluation form. (See Appendix Evaluations)

The questions were mainly about the Bowen treatments with relation to their Scleroderma and their feelings about it.

For instance did they learn more about Scleroderma? Did the treatment sessions influence their way of dealing with Scleroderma. Did they learn more about how their body reacted and did they change their attitude after the Bowen treatments?

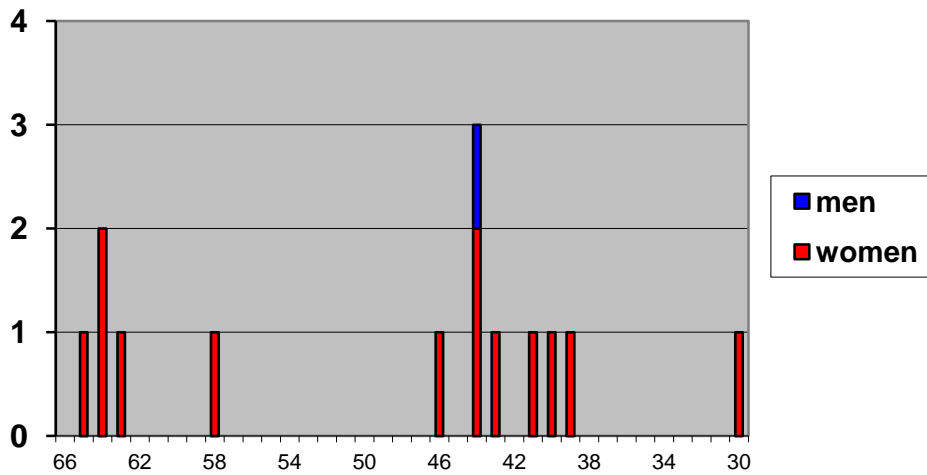


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## Overview of Participants

### age of participants



### Residence of participants





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## **Levels of Scleroderma**

The differences between all participants were diverse. The symptoms of scleroderma vary greatly per individual, and the effects of scleroderma can range from very mild to life threatening. The seriousness will depend on the parts of the body which are affected and the extent to which they are affected. A mild case can become more serious if not properly treated. Prompt and proper diagnosis coupled with treatment by qualified physicians may minimize the symptoms of scleroderma and reduce the chance for irreversible damage. It is therefore always very difficult to judge about the condition of one person. What is considered mild from a medical point of view is one thing, but the client can experience an intense amount of pain and problems. It is difficult to measure what exhaustion can do to a person as it is a personal experience and therefore nobody can make a judgment about another person's perception. Of course there are known medical conclusions and the differences between the 14 participants varied from dealing with Scleroderma as some take medication for stem cell treatment and others take additional forms of medication. As it was not my place to judge or have opinions about types or amounts of medication, for this reason, I did not make any differentiation in the results and conclusions regarding the level of Scleroderma.

## **Medications**

There was however large variation between the intake of medication. There were some similarities, but also a lot of differences. One female and one male participant had the most medication and they both have had many difficult treatments.

One of the male participants used 18 pills in total. He had endured 6 times chemotherapy, which had no effect. The last attempt was made with Tracleer for 5 months, but the impact was minimal. They increased the doses to see if it made a difference, however it is important to note that Tracleer is harmful for the liver.

He was very negative going into my study as he had lost hope for a proper solution.

Although he believed that the Bowen treatments did not work for him, his wife said she noticed that there were positive changes and asked if I could help him with additional therapy. Unfortunately the distance was too far to my practice and I referred him to another Bowen Therapist. Unfortunately, he ultimately chose not to continue with further treatments.

One of the female participants also had asthma. She did however give birth, which was very dangerous and she almost lost the baby. After the birth, she did not recover very well and a stem cell treatment was the only hope for her to survive. Fortunately, it indeed saved her life.

As she cannot eat normal food, she uses an internal system to feed herself with liquid diet during the night.

After everything she has been through, she remains very positive about her life.



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Unfortunately, the Bowen treatments did not work for her; perhaps it needed more time to feel the effects.

### Privacy statement

For privacy reasons the identity of the different participants will not be published in this paper.

### Perception of participants (my facts)

The input of the questionnaires has been structured and translated into different graphics, especially regarding the progress over the different weeks.

Participant's perceptions were recorded on a scale of 1-10 on a daily basis. (1 = no pain/feeling good/no problems, 10 is severe pain/feeling bad/lots of problems).

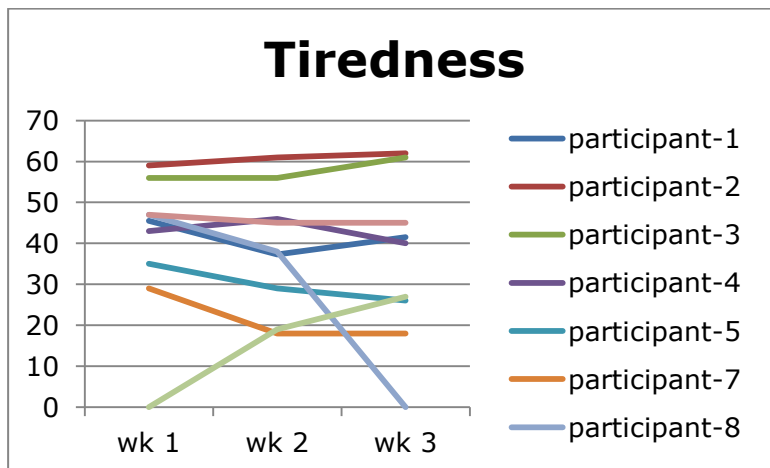
In the graphics the total results per week have been presented. (Max 7 x 10 = 70)

Every participant is represented by a different color. As not all subjects were relevant for all individuals, all graphics will have less than 14 colors.

Unfortunately 2 participants did not send back their weekly results, only the total evaluation form. Graphics of the results of the individual participants can be found in appendix Individual Results.

The graphics per subject (at least 3 participants were involved) are:

- Tiredness
- Stiffness
- Pain back
- Pain legs
- Pain arms
- Pain feet
- Raynaud
- Tight skin

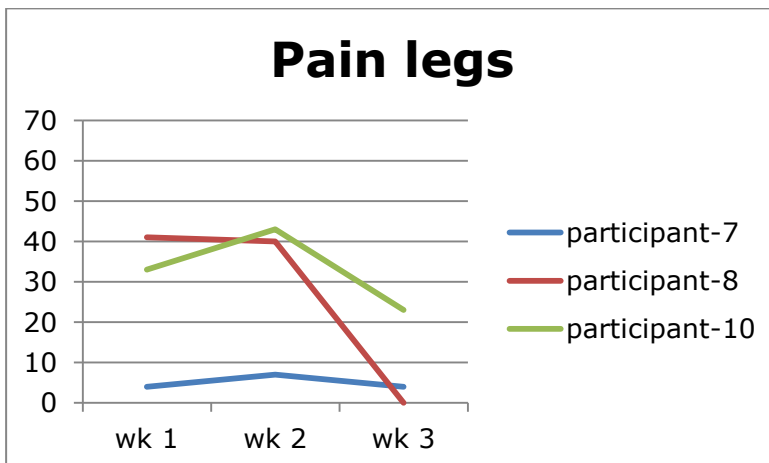
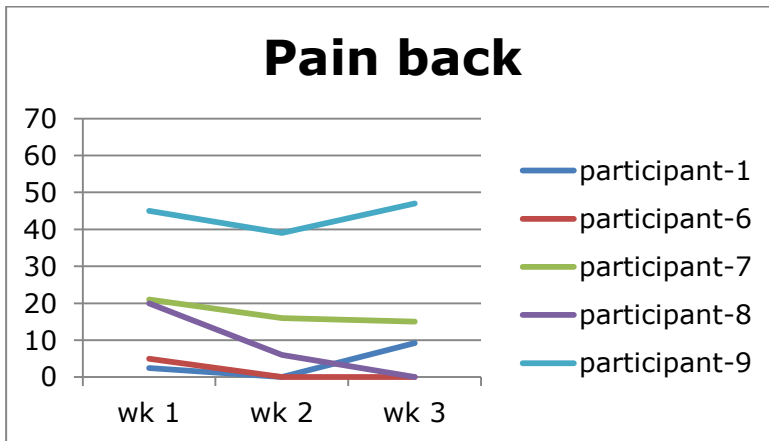
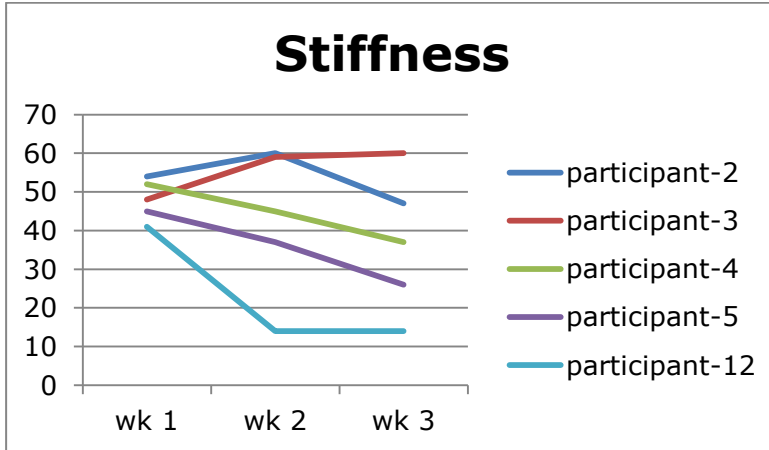






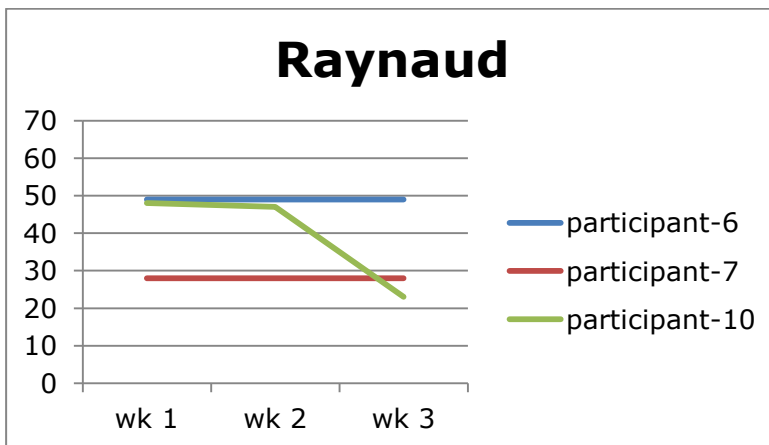
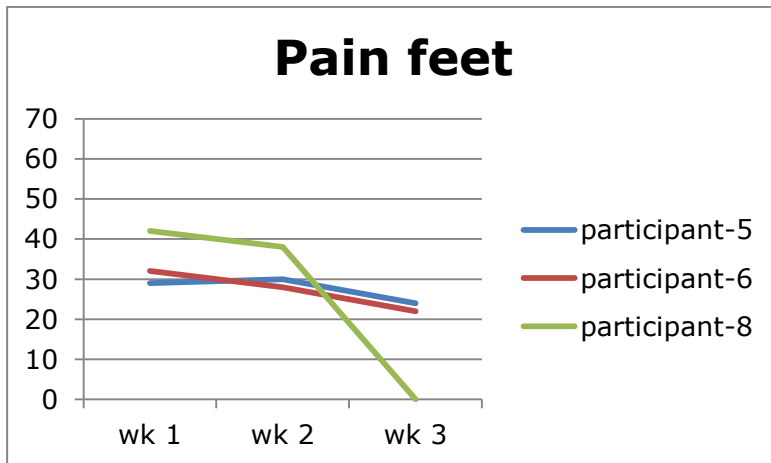
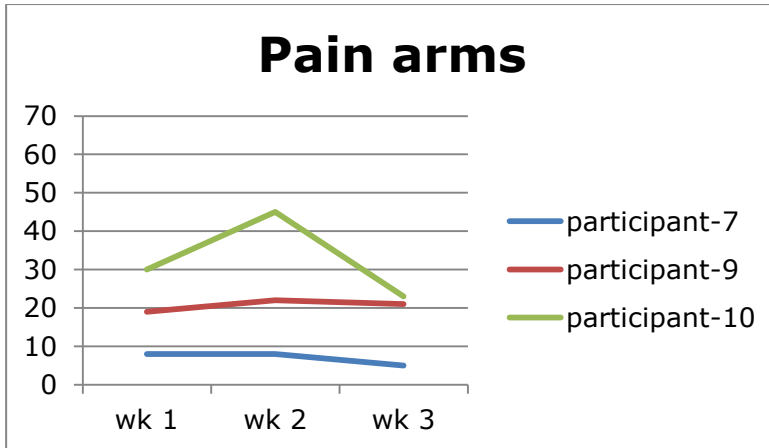
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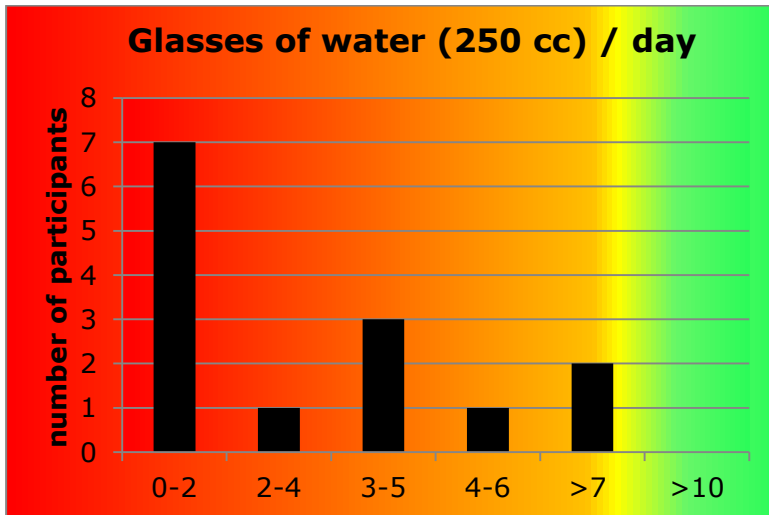
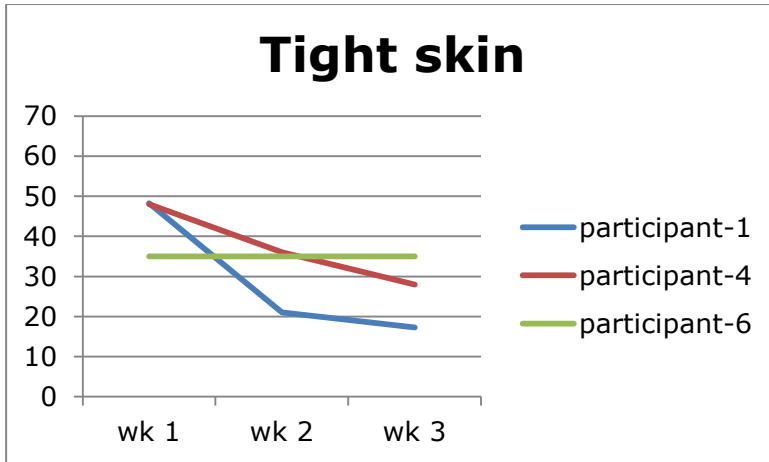




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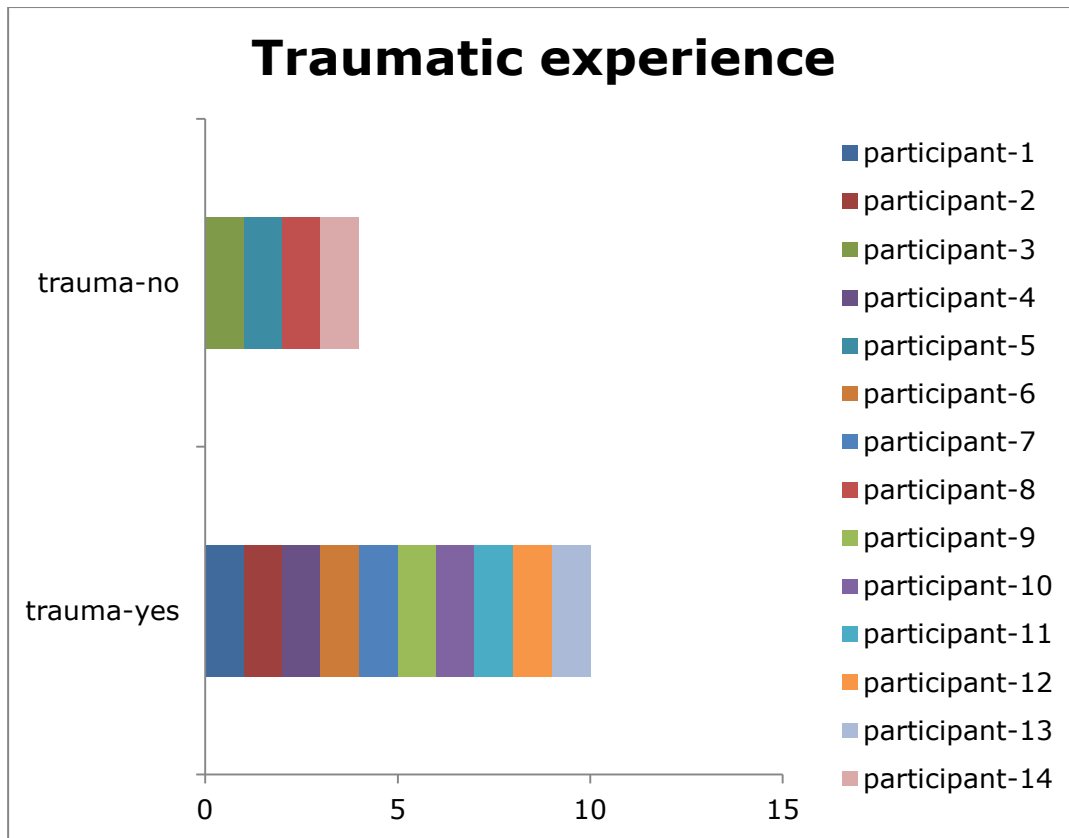
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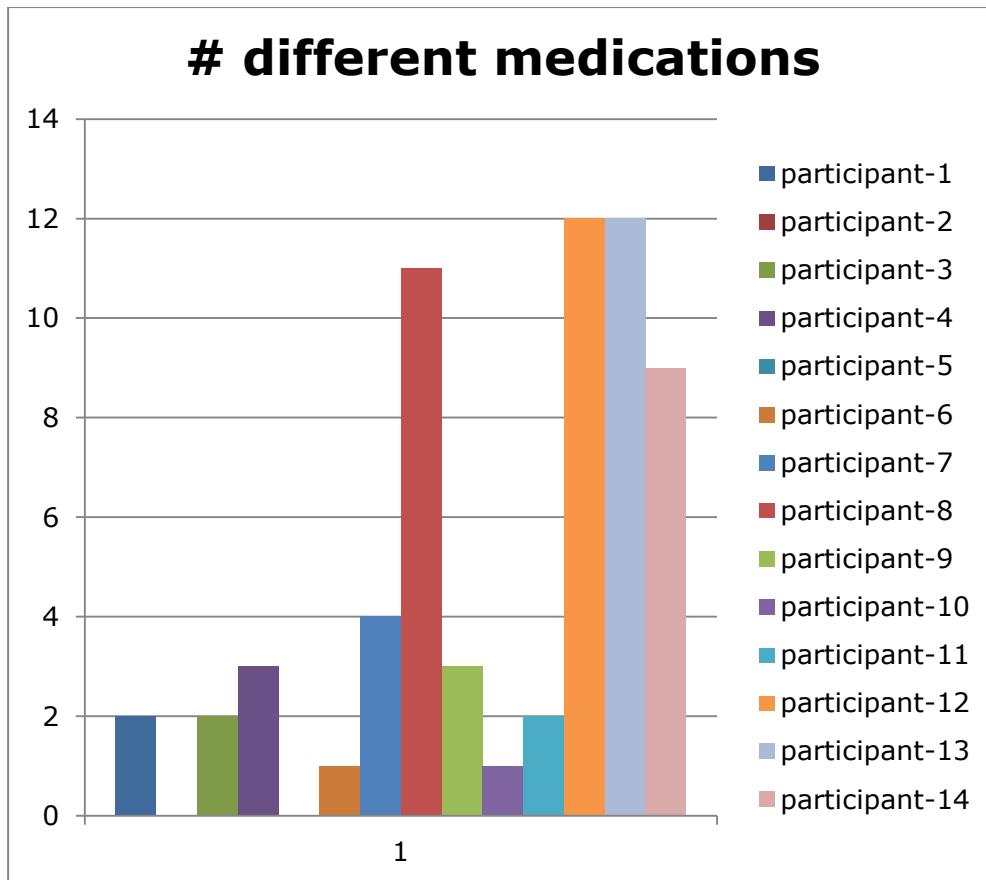
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## Conclusions

### The influence of Medication and Emotions

#### Medication

I think the major conclusion is that medication blocks the response and ability of the body to heal itself. The more medication, the more non response there is. The Bowen Technique gives the body tools to start healing itself. This goes through the Connective Tissue, which is a very important layer in the body structure that makes communication through the body possible. Medication might influence the connective tissue resulting in that the body does not intuitively know what to do anymore.

Of course medication is necessary when the disease is exploding, which happened with 3 participants involved. The reaction of their bodies was, in their opinion not positive. But they were the only ones who had a lot of medication and other heavy treatments and therefore it may be necessary to further investigate the influence of these variables in the future.

Unfortunately 2 other participants did not co-operate very well. One lost the papers with the results and the other did not return results over the post in a timely manner. Perhaps they were very disappointed and therefore response was not very accurate.

Fortunately I had my own registration, but was disappointed by their attitude.

#### Emotions and stress

Emotions are of great importance for healing the body and the mind.

The desire to heal must be present as well as a positive attitude.

Scientific research shows that emotions stimulate very specific activities in the nervous system. This means that the nervous system has the intelligence to distinguish between positive and negative emotions, as well as between different negative emotions.

The idea of the body and brain being completely separate is fast being replaced by the holistic model of mind, body and spirit being intimately connected.

In his book, *The Biology of Belief*, cellular biologist Bruce Lipton, PhD shares current biomedical research about how a person's beliefs become their biology. With each heartbeat, the heart communicates with the body, heart and brain through the nervous system, hormonal system, electromagnetic fields and other energetic pathways. These internal communication networks (connective tissue\*) also affect the way one perceives their reality which greatly influences the emotions the person experiences.

(Publication in *Choice Health Magazine* by K.G. Stiles, owner of Springhill Wellness Center and Director of Health Mastery Systems. Author of *Guidebook to Healing Your Rainbow Bridge*).

\* In my opinion the connective tissue is the internal communication network.



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The will to recover is therefore a person's own choice. Others can help, but it always begins with the question: "What can I do, to heal myself?"

The book of Christine Beerlandt ("de sleutel tot zelf-bevrijding" = "the key to self-liberation") gives a core cause and a core solution about diseases. She explains how diseases in the on-set begin and how it is possible to bring fundamental healing through understanding and application. Every disease is a symptom of something much deeper, a signal of the fact that on a deeper psycho-emotional level something goes wrong.

During my research this became very clear to me, but was difficult to share with others. To analyze yourself much more deeply than normal is very difficult and confronting. Not every person is able to do this and it was not my place to deal with this.

Our modern day lifestyle promotes living in a chronic condition of stress and subject to an increasing array of environmental toxins. Trauma's are of great influence for getting sick. In her book "Molecules of Emotions", Candace B. Pert, PH.D. says that when writing about your experiences, physiological changes occur, such as increased blood flow and a boost for the immune system that can last for up to six months. She also recommends meditation as a stress reliever. But she also mentions that touch therapies of massage, chiropractic and other modalities that include the body as a means of healing the mind and emotions are positive influencers as well. She admits that humans store some memory in the brain, but by far, the deeper, older messages are stored in the body and must be accessed through the body. She quotes, "The body is your subconscious mind, and you can not heal it by talk alone". (Page 306).

This confirms my findings that people with Scleroderma and probably other immune diseases have experienced some kind of trauma. Mostly they are aware of it, others cannot remember, but this could have occurred during the pregnancy of their mother or during child-birth, which is a trauma in itself. Researchers believe the development that occurs from *in utero* to early childhood is the most critical development period in humans and this is when the brain can reorganize itself to overcome damage and compensate for parts that have endured injury.

(Study by Eyre, 2004: Reported on a two year research program, asked, "can the brain be "re-wired" to help children overcome disability? Publication in Choice Health & wellbeing)

"Given the response of many children to Bowen treatment, it might well be that the Bowen Technique should be a prime therapy candidate for this further investigation, into how it may stimulate the brain to re-wire itself." (Janie Godfrey, practitioner of the Bowen Technique (UK))



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The Bowen Technique works on those layers which hold the emotions in our body: the connective tissue. So working there means letting go. Often, during or after a treatment people can finally cry or become angry at last. Because of this, they learn to listen to their body and can respond to the alarm bells the body sends to them, preventing themselves to fall back into the previous situation before treatment.

The balance returns between the parasympathetic nerve system and the sympathetic nerve system. The healing can then begin.

Given my research findings related to the very different reactions of the participants, it is my belief that the influence of various factors, such as medication, trauma's, stress, personality, the ability to deal with emotions, the will to get better, the way you were born and the period *in utero* to early childhood, are all very important for the possibility to heal and recover. The number of treatments is also a major influence on people with scleroderma. Three Bowen treatments were able to make some changes in positive and negative ways, and people felt that something had happened. However after 4 treatments, the changes became even more tangible and visible for participants who were treated more times. The longer they came, the more benefit was realized through the treatments, because it gave them peace of mind, relaxation and more happiness.

Stiffness was less and they were able to make plans and to pick up their lives again with more hope for the future. And this meant: less pain, less discomfort, more energy, better concentration, cheerful and positive.

"Emotions play an important role in pain problems and the fascial web".

The intake of a new client is very important for a Bowen therapist. We ask a lot of questions about the younger years and even, when the client knows it, how birth of the client took place. Was it easy for the mother, were there problems, etc. Also important was the situation at home. Was it stressful, was there a lot of shouting, fighting, was the client not allowed to cry? Were they touched with love or was this deemed not 'normal'. But also important is the current situation. Are they working, do they like it, do they have a stable home situation. All these emotions are very important to know, because it is often part of the problem, although many clients don't realize the link between their complaints and their emotional state in the beginning of the treatment. Working on clients with Scleroderma can give huge emotional reactions. Their early traumas are stored in the connective tissue and doing Bowen work they will be released from the body and this can have different responses: anger, grief, quickly agitated, pain, stiffness, headaches, back pain, shoulder/neck problems, to name but a few. Emotions also play an important role in the fascial web. In the book: *The endless web* by R.Louis Schultz, PhD and Rosemary Feitis, DO, they write about the *Emotions and the Fascial Web* (chapter 11).

They say that patterns we have absorbed unconsciously are harder to change. They are more engrained in our characters than those that are absorbed knowingly through conscious learning. (page. 48). According to the *Handbook for Bodywork* by Deane Juhan, (page 43/touch as food): The internal states of mind





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and of physical health, directly affect the skin. Transitory moods are reflected by paling, flushing, goose flesh, cold shivers, sweating etc. . . .

Chronic anxiety and exhaustion darken the area under the eyes.

Healthy circulation makes the surface pink and warm; liver failure makes it yellow and clammy. Faulty diet can make it too dry and too oily.

Acute emotional distress can erupt in a plethora of rashes, bumps, pimples and boils.

According to Deane Juhan, there is evidence that indeed there is an intimate connection between the skin and the central nervous system network and that it goes further than we think.

Already in the 1915's James H.M. Knox Jr. of the Johns Hopkins Hospital noted that, in spite of adequate physical care, 90% of the infants in Baltimore orphanages and foundling homes, died within a year of admission. The period between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> month of life was the time of the highest fatalities. Infants who managed to survive their first year uniformly showed severe physical retardation.

The lack of tender loving care seemed to be crucial to a baby's development. Without it, no amount of food and no kind of medicine could produce a healthy child. The change to ensure that there were enough attendants for each infant to be held, handled, talked to, played with every day, caused the infant mortality rates to plummet and made a huge difference.

(From the book: Job's body, page 44)

The link between emotions, the skin, touching and Bowen therapy is of great importance of how the body can react, can cope and how the body can heal itself. Therefore, the history of a person is of influence to the reactions of the treatment that were given and the time they needed to recover.

The Bowen therapy works on the fascial web / connective tissue. It helps the body to recover from pain. It activates the power of healing itself. This takes time and is sometimes dependent on different factors as I described above. Pain is one way the body communicates to us and it is a signal that something is not going right. In China they say that it is not important to know what kind of disease you have, there is just something wrong in your body, no matter what it is called.

### **And what about stress?**

Stress is a normal fact of life and not always negative. We need stress to function during intense situations. When you are facing a lion, you need a lot of stress to run, and your body will only let the important parts of your body work. What is not important will not function. Your heart rate will increase due to the adrenaline; your blood pressure will rise as well as your breathing rate and blood sugar so that your blood receives extra oxygen and your muscles will and can work harder.

As soon as the threat disappears your stress level will fall and your body finds it's balance again. This is called the Sympathetic Nervous System Response.



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Chronic stress however leads to abnormal levels of hormones being secreted into the bloodstream for prolonged periods, mainly cortisol from the adrenal glands, which can adversely affect brain function, particularly memory and sleep. Stress can have many long-term effects of the body and one's sense of wellbeing. It affects mood and energy levels, lower immunity to infection, accelerates the aging process and inflammation in the body. It also increases the risk of stroke and heart-attack, stomach ulcers, osteoporosis and can lead to unhealthy lifestyle behavior such as poor diet, increased alcohol, medication consumption and cigarette smoking.

We can't avoid stress completely and it can be a positive motivator to enhance our performance, such as running a race or finishing a deadline task.

It is the prolonged state of stress (feeling threatened, overloaded and 'distressed') that has negative consequences on our health and leads to 'dis-ease'. (Website Sandra Gustafson, Bowenwork / practitioner and instructor USA/California; [www.bowenworkforlife.com](http://www.bowenworkforlife.com))

### **The impact of stress for people with Scleroderma is large.**

It can increase stiffness, tiredness, reduction of energy levels, sleeping problems, feelings of insecurity, etc.

One of my clients had a professional psychologist who claimed that she should not act as if she was 70 years of age (age of client is early 30). She said this during the first meeting they had and this person knew nothing about my client or her condition. Part of the problem was that her father had died and she needed help to handle this and simultaneously deal with her disease process. She got very emotional during the session and had a lot of stiffness in her body when she left.

The night after this conversation she felt very strange: it felt as if she could not function anymore, she could not move and her head was very heavy and she felt a huge blockage in her head and neck. The impact was enormous. She was very afraid something was very wrong with her because she was not able to move.

The ignorance of this "professional" had major consequences.

Therefore it is very important to understand the problems people face with Scleroderma. They often feel very insecure about themselves. Confrontation in a negative and insensitive manner results in a lot of stress and grief.

On the outside, it is difficult to see that anything is wrong with a Scleroderma patient. People in general think that you are faking or put you in a box with well known diseases.

They even accuse you of using Botox for your skin.

Acute emotional distress can erupt in a plethora of rashes, bumps, pimples and boils (Handbook for Bodywork by Deane Juhan), a good thing to know for other therapists/specialists in particular psychologists.

The Bowen technique is a unique and unusual form of soft-tissue bodywork that is very effective in relaxing muscle tension and reducing the body's stress levels. The first moves will give a deep relaxation and put the client at ease and ready for the treatment. You often hear the client take a deep breath.

One of the strongest procedures for stress is working on the Diaphragm.



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The powerful moves on the diaphragm goes over some strong attachments of the diaphragm onto the xyphoid, the linea alba and the faciform ligament (a remnant of the umbilical vein) which goes through the liver.

This could be why this move can have such a strong emotional effect as it touches on very deep tissue memories to do with connection, our first breath and coming into this world. (The Bowen technique, the inside story by John Wilks) As presented in their evaluation almost all the participants had a traumatic experience and have had a lot of stress during their life and you might say that this could be one of the factors of getting Scleroderma (or another auto-immune disease). Trauma's have a large impact on the Psoas muscle. Of course there are much more procedures to do, but one of the very important procedures when a client is in stress is The Psoas. The Psoas is one of the core muscles in the body, not only in terms of posture but also on an emotional and psychological level. The Psoas and the diaphragm, come together at a junction point known as the Solar Plexus. It is an area behind the stomach, centered near the naval and in front of the aorta and diaphragm, which houses a nerve network. The Psoas is very special. It has been called many names, for instance: the 'great pretender', a conductor, and the "fight of flight muscle ". So working on the Psoas is very powerful for letting go the stress and emotions. A person can finally cry or get very angry. As this is so powerful, this is the reason that I only work on the Psoas after the first three treatments. So this was only the case for three participants. The powerful impact was proven by all three. There are not many therapies that can work on the Psoas, the Bowen therapy and the Emmett therapy\* are, by my knowledge, the only ones.

Working on the people with Scleroderma I noticed lots of stress in their body. Of course the effects of the disease and the way to acceptance are very stressful. There is a lot of uncertainty about the progress of the disease. Scleroderma is unpredictable and that makes your future life difficult. The disease can change overnight and that makes your life stressful. It is also important that stress is reduced because it has a negative influence on the disease. More- stress means more stiffness and more pain. After Bowen treatments you can see, as presented in the evaluation results that almost all participants feel more relaxed.

\*A safe and simple muscle release therapy developed by Remedial Therapist Ross Emmett ([www.rossemmett.com.au](http://www.rossemmett.com.au))

Education, especially for professionals, is very important to prevent the wrong attitudes from professionals patients depend on.

I hope that this paper contributes to this education and will increase the understanding of what Scleroderma can do to a person, physically, mentally and emotionally.

### **The importance of drinking water**

It appears that most of the participants did not drink enough water. They only took a glass of water for the intake of their medication.

Why is drinking water so important?

Our bodies contain approximately 55% - 78% water, depending on body size.



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It is recommended to have a daily intake of 8 glasses of 250 cc water a day to replace the liquid that we naturally lose through excretion.

Water enhances health, releases toxins, carries nutrients to every cell and improves circulation and blood flow resulting in a radiant and brighter complexion.

(Daniela Chandler Pevonia UK, [www.pevonia.uk.com/Choice Health & Wellbeing 18/12](http://www.pevonia.uk.com/Choice Health & Wellbeing 18/12))

In conclusion, one can say that especially for people with Scleroderma, drinking water is of great importance and should therefore be recommended by the specialist. See appendix The importance of drinking water.

### **Evaluation participants**

To summarize, this study has been a very interesting journey with 14 very special people. The interesting responses that they provided are documented in the separate Appendix Evaluations.

### **Main conclusions based on the evaluations of all participants:**

- 13 out of 14 experienced the Bowen treatment as positive
- 12 out of 14 changed their behavior after the treatments
- 9 out of 14 experienced a positive effect after three treatments
- For 10 out of 14 the treatment meant something for them personally
- For 12 out of 14 it was pleasant that the therapist had the same disease
- 12 out of 14 will recommend the Bowen technique to others
- 9 out of 14 experienced an increased quality of life after the treatments

### **Some quotes:**

"I feel lighter and more relaxed"

"It does not hurt, pleasant feeling"

"The soft and simple actions give a good result"

"It is very special that such small minimal movements bring about such large effects"

"Something happened in my body"

"Less cramped, more energy"

"I enjoyed meeting you and learned about your enthusiasm about the Bowen Technique"

"Recognition of symptoms and some simple solutions are helpful; it feels good that your complaints are taken seriously"



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## **Appendices**

<b>Appendix I:</b>	<b>Individual results</b>	<b>(page I1 – I6)</b>
<b>Appendix Q:</b>	<b>Questionnaires</b>	<b>(page Q1 – Q21)</b>
<b>Appendix E:</b>	<b>Evaluations</b>	<b>(page E1 – E6)</b>
<b>Appendix R:</b>	<b>Reynaud</b>	<b>(page R1 – R3)</b>
<b>Appendix B:</b>	<b>Bowen Technique</b>	<b>(page B1 – B5)</b>
<b>Appendix S:</b>	<b>Scleroderma</b>	<b>(page S1 – S8)</b>
<b>Appendix W:</b>	<b>The importance of drinking water</b>	<b>(page W1)</b>