

The Bowen Technique

A lump in the throat

by Janie Godfrey

Feeling emotional and having to hold back the evidence of it is so common that we describe such instances as times when we had 'a lump in my throat'. The sensation usually passes when we either have a good cry or a good rant or the situation changes. But quite a number of people are bothered with a very frequent or even constant 'lump in the throat'.

They describe it as feeling like a golf ball, or even a fur ball (the cat lovers!) being stuck in their throat, or that the tie is too tight, or as if they are being strangled. Often the severity of the feeling fluctuates throughout the day, being better in the morning, worsening as the day goes on. Swallowing is often very difficult and some people cannot even contemplate swallowing something like meat, so choose only soft or liquid nourishment. Stress aggravates the symptoms.

Medically, this common condition is called a cricopharyngeal spasm. The cricopharyngeus (CP) muscle is the lowest horizontal band-like muscle of the throat. The esophagus begins just below the cricopharyngeus, which acts as a one-way valve. It remains tight and closed to keep stomach and esophageal contents from coming back up into the throat during straining or bending over. During a swallow, it temporarily relaxes to allow food to pass.

As mentioned above, the very term 'a lump in the throat' can be a way of saying you are experiencing deep emotion. A cricopharyngeal spasm is also a graphic way of stating, "I can't swallow that", i.e., a situation is something you are not willing to 'take in' or 'digest'. So here we see a manifestation of the mind-body connection appearing in a symptom, often a very persistent symptom.

Lynne, a woman in her 50's came for Bowen treatment for a variety of aches and pains and it came out in the medical history that she had suffered from a very tight, 'lumpy' throat for decades. She managed it by avoiding situations, if she could, which she knew would be stressful and taking tranquillizers when it was bad. She was very seldom free of at least some slight sensation of tightness. In discussion, she realized that it started when she was still living with her parents and the existence of an on-going tense, difficult and unresolved situation was not to be spoken of. Her throat symptoms embodied the idea that things needed to be pushed down, clamped and not referred to.

Bowen treatment had a wonderful effect on Lynne's habitual anxiety levels and became a very welcome and effective tool in her management of these long-

established patterns of coping. It is quite common for people to say, usually after their first Bowen treatment, something like, "I don't know what it is, but I feel so much better in myself". Anxiety levels do seem to decrease and, if the stress factors are still there, the person feel much more able to cope with them. It follows then, logically and experientially, that symptoms of stress and anxiety such as the lump in the throat will also diminish or disappear.

Bowen had the same effect on another woman, 40-year-old Olivia. A single mum of two small children, juggling work and home and child-rearing along with trying to limit the frequently negative emotional impact of the ex-husband's visits, Olivia was worn to a frazzle. She paid many visits to her doctor, insisting that he get to the bottom of what was causing this throat problem that had been going on for more than a year. She was sure there was some sort of growth that needed to be taken care of. As a consequence, she endured a number of unpleasant investigations and scans. No physical problem was revealed. Olivia had two or three Bowen treatments and, for about 8 or so weeks, they were either very mild or gone completely. After the 'lump' had returned for some months she came to Bowen again and, again, after one or two treatments, the throat tightness virtually disappeared. She finds it hard to believe that such strong physical symptoms can be manifestations of pressure and stress, so it is difficult for her to take firm steps in changing the stresses in her life to the extent that she reasonably can, given the responsibility she carries.

Physical symptoms that are so closely connected with stress very often respond well and quickly to Bowen treatment. It seems to assist all the parts of a person - body, mind, spirit, situation-perception, circumstances, strengths and weaknesses - to work together in coping with what life throws at them rather than carrying the burdens around like unwanted baggage.

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