

The EMMETT Technique - The Chameleon Approach to Body Therapy



Modules 1 & 2 of the EMMETT Technique
November 28th - 29th 2015

By Catherine Stone

On November 28th - 29th 2015, I attended a course on Modules 1 & 2 of the EMMETT Technique, a simple yet effective form of bodywork that aims to 'turn off' certain activation points causing neuromuscular problems by tapping into the neurological pathways of the body, thus regaining muscle balance and stability. I am a sports and remedial therapist, but had never heard of this technique until recently when I met Lesley Salt and Sue Gassick, directors of Emmett Therapies UK. They demonstrated one key technique on me to give me a flavour of what they do: it only took thirty seconds, but was so effective that it seemed like a magic trick and I thought I had to find out more about this!



Ross Emmett

He always had an interest in the body - both animal and human, and had an intuition from early on about certain points (described as Emmett points on the course, but they could also be described as trigger points). There are similarities between his style and a number of other modalities, including acupressure and neuromuscular therapy (NMT) / Trigger point therapy. But Ross

developed his treatment before studying holistic therapies, through experimenting with what came naturally to him. Coming from a remote part of Australia far from medical help, he would treat the various aches and pains of his mining colleagues and other rural people. He then went on to study various complimentary therapies, and became a senior instructor in massage and Bowen Therapy. During teaching these techniques his students could see Ross had something special and there was a growing call for him to formalize and teach his own approach. Since the '90s, he has been training more and more people in the Emmett Technique, and it is now spreading around the globe, being applied by a variety of complimentary therapists and even medical professionals.

The EMMETT Technique came to the UK in 2007 and is gaining in popularity already. Lesley Salt came to it after getting into complimentary therapies including Bowen in order to help her sick child. She teaches all of the 6 modules, as well as advanced classes, and has trained with Ross himself. She also teaches the EMM-Tech short course, an introductory one-day course that is open to all. On the course I attended, there were ten people from varied backgrounds including medicine, osteopathy, massage, Reiki. The course took place in the Graham Spicer Institute building in New Malden (courses are taught in various places across the UK), conveniently one minute away from the station. Lesley was a very engaging

teacher and we covered a lot in two days, yet without being overwhelmed. There was a good balance between theory and hands-on practice. The way the courses are taught is very helpful, as they revise the previous stage as you go along, providing a layering of information.

We went through the various contraindications and cautions first, being told which points to avoid or be careful with in certain circumstances. For instance, as with massage, EMMETT can lower the blood pressure, so you have to be careful with people with low blood pressure by getting them up slowly and gently after the treatment and giving them water, etc.

We were then introduced to the main points of the EMMETT Technique. First, you test the area you are treating for restrictions and pain, etc. The tests are very easy and make clear to the client as well as the



therapist their current restrictions. One of the main tests is for psoas instability. You can test psoas stability by placing your hand on the client's sacrum and giving them a gentle push. If they stumble forwards, there is a lack of stability.

Muscle imbalance and tension are caused by a number of reasons, such as lifestyle, injury or overuse. The psoas muscle covers a large central area of the body and is a key posture muscle, often out of balance due to long periods of sitting down. Tension in one area can lead to tension in another, so that imbalance in the psoas can impact on the many other muscles that it connects with (and vice versa), such as the trapezius, iliacus and quadratus lumborum, affecting an individual's stability, posture and balance. So as well as treating the area of pain / restriction, it is useful to treat the psoas as well. e.g. The quadratus lumborum is usually the first muscle recommended to look at with lower back pain - there can be tension there if the psoas is imbalanced, and work in this area can help to balance the pelvis. Treating the psoas could potentially help to alleviate tightness in the shoulders due to the connection with the trapezius. Alleviating psoas tension could also potentially improve breathing quality, due to the proximity of that muscle with the diaphragm. And tightness in the psoas can even affect the bowels and bladder.

One way you can treat the psoas is to place one 'EMMETT Finger' (the middle finger) gently on a point that is two finger widths / about one centimetre from the belly button and one finger on the '12th Rib Point', which is between the 11th and 12th ribs, just lateral to the erector spinae. As with almost all of the points, this can be done with the client lying down (in this case supine), seated or standing, and it can be done

through clothing. So the EMMETT Technique basically involves applying gentle, direct finger pressure – often two fingers in different associated places, sometimes one finger on a particular point making a 'switch' movement / a stroke in one direction. In certain areas you direct your fingers in certain directions or angles. It is often the case that very gentle pressure can be very effective and is all that is required, although you can be firmer if the client responds more to that – as always, you go with the client's preference.

Different therapists experience different sensations when they press on the EMMETT points. I often felt a 'throbbing' between them, as if I could feel an electrical pulse. Some clients feel things while being treated, and some do not. When being practised on, I occasionally felt a slight numbness or 'nervy' sensation. Another lady on the course felt slightly dizzy. Even if the client does not feel anything themselves, the therapist can observe small things, and this is what to look out for when holding the points: you wait for the 'first jump', which may be a small twitch, flutter of the eyes or fingers or some such reaction, which tells you that you are in the correct spot. Then you hold for between four and twenty seconds or until you get another sign – clients can even have a little shudder, have a sharp intake of breath or some other sign – and this indicates that the activator / trigger point has been successfully turned off. You can repeat holding the points up to three times after re-testing should you feel it is necessary. At the end, you 'make nice' – gently apply a single stroke with the back of your hand to signal to the area that you have finished treating it.



After about thirty seconds, it is believed the brain has processed this 'rewiring'. Re-testing the client and demonstrating improvements in range of movement / reduction in restrictions gives them confidence in you as a therapist, and gives you confidence in your treatment.

The first day of the course (Module 1) also included holding points around the obliques, piriformis [insert pics. 5 and 6] and T.F.L. muscles, and the points we learned that day made up an effective sequence that can be used to treat lower back pain. The handouts were thorough and contain useful pictures, easy to refer back to when practising. The second day focused on points around the shoulder and neck and again, we all had positive results when we practised on each other. We discussed how to incorporate EMMETT into our practice. It can be used as a stand-alone treatment or, as is often the case, alongside any other form of therapy including massage. It is a great tool to have during a treatment: if you are massaging a client, you can treat a problem area with the various techniques you already use, and then hold a few EMMETT points if you think it will further help, just as a sports therapist would employ a mixture of techniques such as soft tissue release and different forms of stretching alongside massage.

The other important component in EMMETT is the therapist's rapport with the client. Ross also studied Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Hypnotherapy, being interested in the blend between mind and body. He promotes the 'Chameleon' approach to treatments, meaning adapting



course diary

emmett technique

your communication and treatment to each individual case, as everyone responds best to slightly different things. The 'seven 'A's are a quick guide to points to keep in mind; they include setting the right atmosphere, and having a positive and open-minded attitude.

The EMMETT Technique has been shown to aid the healing process of injuries even if they are new (depending on the case), due to the light touch. It has also had good results for people with neurological conditions such as strokes. And it can help to stimulate the lymphatic system: for example, the technique on the gastrocnemius muscle is said to improve drainage in that area by releasing tension and blockages there [insert pic. 8]. What has also been observed is that when something on one side of the body has been corrected, often it seems as if the other side will correct itself, as if the brain responds to the neurological 'rewiring' by further helping itself. More and more research is being done into exactly how EMMETT works. It was born out of instinct, but as is being brought to a wider audience, there is obviously a call to give it a more scientific grounding. Different aspects are being examined, including the lymphatic aspect. One piece of research is being done by Dr. Caroline Hughes in Belfast, who is collecting 1200 pieces of data. I felt that the way it works is similar to

current thinking on how the fascia responds to neurological techniques, and as fascia holds tension and covers all of our muscles and is interlinked, with neurological properties, I believe it is a key component in how EMMETT works.

The adaptability of the EMMETT Technique makes it easy for practitioners to mix with other treatment styles, and to tackle a variety of conditions. It is safe to use on children - Ross has demonstrated improvements in children with various disabilities, for instance. It is even safe to use on babies, as it is so gentle: for example, restrictions feeding on one side can be treated by applying the techniques around the sternocleidomastoid muscle. It is even used on animals: one lady on our course came to train after having both her horse and herself treated successfully. As always, if you are unable to improve the condition of your client, it is best to refer them onto another professional. But the course showed me



that in many instances, this therapy can be very effective, and I am looking forward to trying it out with my clients, and learning more.

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Catherine Stone is a sports and remedial massage therapist who also does pregnancy and Thai massage, and manual lymphatic drainage. Her clinic is based at Neal's Yard Remedies Borough Market, London, and she also does office visits and home visits in Crouch End.