

INCLINED BED THERAPY

A NEW ANGLE ON HEALTH

Sleeping on a bed inclined at five degrees has great benefits for circulation, metabolism and the immune system. It can also ease a range of conditions from Alzheimer's disease, diabetes and glaucoma to migraines, multiple sclerosis and varicose veins.

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There are some things in life that we seem to accept without question. For most of us in Western countries, sleeping in a horizontal position is one of them. However, after studying the circulatory system in plants, one man questioned the logic in our flat bed theory. Andrew K. Fletcher has found that raising a bed six to eight inches (~15 to ~20 cm) at the head seems to generate remarkable improvements for many people suffering conditions such as circulatory and respiratory issues, diabetes, leg ulcers, migraines, multiple sclerosis, oedema, Parkinson's disease, skin problems, spinal cord injuries, varicose veins and many more.

How Does it Work?

The connection between plants and raising one's bed six degrees to sleep on an incline may seem strange, but Andrew Fletcher, an Englishman with a mechanical engineering background and an avid interest in how things work, was initially intrigued by the circulation of sap in plants. The question isn't about how trees raise water from their roots up to their leaves, as this implies a one-way flow, but about how trees circulate sap. He says the downward flow generates return flow via molecular drag. Sap becomes dense because 98 per cent of the water is evaporated from leaves. Sap is always denser at the top of a tree, and gravity dictates that this nutrient-dense sap will move to anything acting as a sink down the tree, such as fruit, the trunk, branches or roots. The upward flow is always less dense than the downward flow.

Once Fletcher made this discovery, he realised the possible implications if it were applied to the human body. Some may not agree entirely with Fletcher's plant sap circulation theory¹, but to those gaining relief from his inclined bed therapy this is a moot point. Fletcher elaborates:

"What I'm saying is that circulation began long before the heart developed, and this primary circulation continues to assist the heart, providing we take the direction of gravity into account. It works on the principle that blood entering the capillary vessels in the lungs provides the water and carbon dioxide that we evaporate with each breath. The blood therefore must become denser exiting the lungs, then passes through the heart and is injected back into the main artery, effectively adding denser blood to create a pulsatile flow predominantly down towards the kidneys... [T]he blood entering the venous return from the kidneys is always less dense than the arterial blood flowing to the kidneys."²

"This was a Eureka moment of such magnitude it went off the scale for me and instantly gave birth to Inclined Bed Therapy [IBT]," he notes.³

Fletcher explains how he came to the conclusion that six inches is the ideal height and five degrees the optimum angle to incline a standard double bed for good health (the height to incline a bed can vary slightly depending on the length of the bed, but is based on an angle of around five degrees):

"I used a closed loop of tubing filled with water with a little coloured solution added to where the tube was joined. The joined part of the tube containing the coloured salt solution was placed at the head end of the bed to observe how circulation occurred. [With] up to a four-inch raise on a standard double UK bed, the downward flowing salt solution ran along the bottom of the tube in one side of the loop. The fresh water ran above it in the same side: in other words, two-directional flow in one tube. When the bed was raised a further inch, the complete loop of tubing circulated... [See his experiments at <http://tinyurl.com/gpkfnes>.]

"After varicose veins went flat in four weeks using the six-inch raise which produced a five-degree angle, I knew we had achieved a positive change in circulation.

"I then asked the curator of a Boston museum to measure an ancient Egyptian inclined bed, and it, too, was elevated six inches higher at the head end."⁴

Gravity and Health

Fletcher found more evidence for the influence of gravity on the body, and for lying flat being unhealthy, when he came across NASA research which used subjects lying flat to reproduce the effects of travelling in microgravity as experienced by astronauts in space:

"Flat-bed rest and head-down bed rest have been used and still are being used by countries involved in space flight. Why? Because they can induce...degenerative effects...without taking healthy people into space, at a fraction of the cost."⁵

This is especially relevant for those people confined to bed or who undergo long periods of bed rest due to medical conditions.

The Downhill Slope

An obvious downside to sleeping with the whole body elevated is the slip factor. There are a few ways to stop sliding down the bed quite so much. Fletcher has had a lot of feedback through his IBT community and suggests using a duvet/quilt or blanket as a bottom sheet with the existing bottom sheet placed over it. Also, non-slip fabric as used under doormats can prevent a mattress from slipping if a board wedge is used.

Many people, including patients in hospital, sleep elevated for various health conditions but only with the upper part of the body inclined. However, Fletcher says that alignment is important for circulatory benefits to the whole body, not just the head or trunk:

"The entire body circulation is important and our hip joints don't take kindly to being stressed against their normal rotation as in trying to sleep on one's side with the bed folded in the middle. But there is another cause

for concern about sleeping in a sitting position: pressure sores caused by lack of rotation, for example."⁶

Fletcher advises that the first two weeks of trying inclined bed therapy can be a bit problematic with sore muscles and a stiff neck. Additional water is required to avoid dehydration, as more water is evaporated and excreted via the bladder with IBT. Urine becomes stronger and more waste is removed from the blood.

Another proponent of IBT, Ken Uzzell, a physical therapist, nutritionist and trauma-release therapist, lists potential benefits at his website:

"Emotional trauma releases from three weeks to four weeks and is ongoing depending on incline. This provides good health improvements."⁷

He also reports on side effects and contraindications.

Inclined Bed Therapy Success Stories

After developing his theory in the late 1990s, Fletcher

put ads in the local paper to find people willing to try IBT. Once the Internet became more widely available, he set up the inclinedbedtherapy.com website. It now contains dozens of testimonials including observations from the IBT community. Here are just a few of the reported findings and success stories.

• Varicose veins and oedema

Mainstream treatment of varicose veins and oedema includes resting with the legs elevated. Fletcher explains that this gives relief because the fluid runs into the upper torso. However, once the person rises in the morning the fluid runs down and the swelling reappears.

Oedema is caused because "pressure in the veins is greater than the surrounding tissue, so the fluid flows from veins into the surrounding tissue, causing the swelling". The sloping bed "pulls the varicose veins in" by applying tension to the blood in the veins, and also "lowers pressure in the blood in the veins which causes the fluid to migrate from the legs back into the circulatory system..."⁸

• Urine and fluid retention

Fletcher was advised of spectacular results from one Parkinson's disease sufferer described as swollen "like a water balloon". After his bed was inclined, he released masses of fluid via urination and lost so much weight that by the end of his first week he could no longer fit into his clothes.⁹

Fletcher saw first hand when his father was in hospital in a coma, due to acute renal failure from cancer, how the release of fluid occurred. His father was expected to die imminently and was passing urine that was tar-like due

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to its blood content, and his legs were swollen. Fletcher argued for his father's bed to be raised—and in the process was almost "thrown out" of the hospital. The IBT worked, as Fletcher recounts:

"When they eventually tilted his bed, within a few hours his urine became clear, he regained consciousness... and gained another precious eight months of life..."¹⁰

• Diabetes

In a Micronesian study¹¹ on the effect of IBT on diabetes, researchers reported in their conclusion:

"...sleeping on an inclined bed seems to help efficacy in reducing blood sugar levels with those who were dedicated in controlling their blood sugar levels. Inclined Bed Therapy may not be effective alone. Just like any medicine and approach, to be successful in managing with diabetes it is recommended that diabetic individuals need to incorporate sleeping on inclined beds with medication, taking some alternative remedies and changing lifestyles by eating a proper diet and doing enough exercise."

An unexpected finding was noted:

"Interestingly, all participants listed other problems including: back pain, edema, difficulty sleeping, frequent night urination, snoring, morning light-headedness and pain in joints. All participants claimed to have noticed improvement in all these problems."

• Nervous system, spine and movement disorders

Fletcher realised that sleeping on an incline also appeared to affect the nervous system positively when his mother's ankle gained movement after she'd been using IBT for varicose veins.¹²

One of his early success stories was helping John Cann who had a spinal cord injury and had no movement in his legs. Using IBT among other treatments, he was eventually able to walk between two parallel bars. Footage of a television interview with Cann and Fletcher can be seen on YouTube.¹³

A 12-year-old cerebral palsy sufferer tried inclined bed therapy after Fletcher's serendipitous meeting with her mother, who didn't think there could be any improvement for her daughter. The girl needed callipers and a wheelchair to be mobile at school. After about eight months or so of trying IBT, she got out of her wheelchair at school for the first time.¹⁴

Terri, a multiple sclerosis sufferer, was new to the disease and had constant pain in her left thigh, which

resulted in difficulty walking for any length of time. After she came across IBT, she used books to incline her bed. Almost overnight the pain was gone; however, her husband was irritated by the position of the bed so they put it back down. The pain came back, so again she inclined the bed—and since 1998 has needed no drugs. In a 2015 radio interview, Terri reported that her neurologist had recently told her she would have no need for any further appointments as she was better. He had never seen anyone in this situation get better.¹⁵

• Skin and arthritic disorders

IBT has had positive results on those suffering with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. An IBT participant with severe psoriasis chronicled her healing journey through photos, available for viewing during one of Fletcher's radio interviews at inclinedbedtherapy.com/videos.

A sufferer of psoriatic arthritis with excruciating pain would frequently need to run her hands under hot water for relief and to regain movement. After trying IBT for one night, she had instant relief. She became a friend of Fletcher, and years later she still has no pain, he says.¹⁶

• Immunity and circulation issues

Fletcher reports that IBT seems to boost the immune system. IBT sleepers have noticed they tend not to get as ill as when they slept on a flat bed. He notes that IBT appears to increase metabolism, as those with cold hands and feet feel warmer and don't have a drop in their temperature in the early morning as flat sleepers do.

Fletcher's research shows that when people sleep on an inclined bed, their heart rate decreases by 10–12 beats per minute and their respiration rate decreases by 4–5

breaths per minute, yet circulation increases.

Heads Up on Similar Work

Medical anthropologist Sydney Singer has also looked into the effects of lying flat. His research¹⁷ is based on a 10–30 degree elevation of the head, not the whole body, and some impressive results were found regarding the effects of inclined sleeping on intracranial pressure, in particular research into sleep positions as a possible cause of migraines:

"To our amazement, we found that the majority of the migraineurs in our study experienced relief by this simple sleep position change! Many had no new migraines, after being migraine sufferers for 30 or more

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years! The results were very fast, within a few days. And there were very interesting side effects, too. Our volunteers woke up more alert. Morning sinus congestion was significantly reduced for most people. Some reported that they no longer had certain allergies."

The study also notes the potential that sleeping inclined could have for other conditions affected by brain congestion, such as ADHD, Alzheimer's, asthma, glaucoma, SIDS, sinus congestion and baggy eyes, sleep apnoea and stroke. These observations seem to echo many testimonials at the inclinedbedtherapy.com website. As for Alzheimer's, Singer comments:

"Alzheimer's disease, we believe, might be the end disease caused by chronic brain congestion and pressure from flat sleeping. The cerebral ventricles of the Alzheimer's brain are expanded, suggesting a history of ventricular pressure, and generalized lesions along the ventricles may indicate areas of brain tissue that have deteriorated from this chronic pressure."

How to Raise a Bed

Elevating a bed is simple and inexpensive. Andrew Fletcher's website includes photographs and videos from the IBT community on how to build an inclined bed of wood; how to elevate your bed with plastic bed-raisers available at hardware shops; and how to make bed-raisers with cement-filled plastic bottles, biscuit tins and other materials.¹⁸

Electroherbalism.com also offers advice on how to raise a bed successfully. This includes the suggestion of using a wedge of foam placed under the mattress over the entire length of the bed to raise the height.¹⁹

Clinical Trials and Obstacles to Recognition

Although much of IBT's success is reported from Fletcher's detailed research over more than 20 years and anecdotal evidence from those participating in IBT, Fletcher would welcome more scientific study of his inclined bed theory. So much so, he has drawn up a petition to Dame Sally Claire Davies, Chief Medical Officer for England, imploring her to investigate IBT "through clinical trials" and listing the conditions that he believes should be included in a study.²⁰

Obviously Andrew Fletcher is not in the business of IBT for the money, and perhaps money is one of the reasons why his inclined bed invention hasn't been developed either: it's just too simple to implement. He says that

over the years he has come across medical professionals who believe his IBT is promising and needs further study, but many of these expressions of interest remained just that. He has also been turned away abruptly by medical professionals as well as by charities with their own agendas. Published on his website are letters he has written, asking for help with trials, and many a rejection.²¹ As Fletcher reveals:

"It has been a battle to get doctors, nurses, surgeons, academia and charities to...investigate their own assumptions about circulation. The problem is that it is so simple, it has been hiding in plain sight since the

Egyptian inclined beds were pulled from the Pharaohs' tombs and displayed in museums without anyone asking, 'Why are all these beds inclined?'"²²

For more in-depth discussion, testimonials and interviews on inclined bed therapy, visit <http://inclinedbedtherapy.com> and the IBT Facebook page.²³

About the Author:

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Endnotes

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