

Family Matters

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Seven years after the car crash that left her in agony

Claire has a smile back on her face at last

BACKCARE AWARENESS WEEK starts tomorrow and, as anyone who has ever suffered from back pain will testify, it can bring untold misery and suffering.

In the UK it's reckoned around five million working days are lost every year due to bad backs and back pain is the second most common cause of long-term sickness absence.

The theme of this year's event, which is run by BackCare, the charity for healthier backs, is **Keep Moving Keep Living** with the key messages being to beat back pain by staying active and exercising regularly.

Finding a solution to back pain is often not easy. A remedy which might work for one person might not necessarily work for another.

Here Family Matters speaks to Claire Bell, who has suffered from back and neck pain for seven years following a car crash, about a treatment, little known as yet, that has worked wonders for her.

CLAIRE (38) says, "The day of the crash is etched on my memory — April 28, 2000. I was sitting at traffic lights in Kirkliston, where I stay, and was the last in the queue.

"In my mirror I could see a lorry coming hurtling along behind me and just knew he wasn't going to stop in time.

"I was sitting with the handbrake on and, even so, I was pushed forward six feet.

"My car was crushed up to behind the front seats and I was pushed into the car in front. Luckily the lights had changed and the car in front of me had moved forward or it could have been worse.

"My neck and shoulders took most of the impact but I also had pain going down my right arm. I couldn't stop it from shaking.

"I had to wear a neck collar for 12 weeks and was off work for over three months."

Burning

In the seven years since then Claire's neck has never been without pain. She's lived with a severe and constant burning sensation in her neck, shoulder and arm which has had a knock-on effect both on her work and her home life.

Claire is customer services manager for Brand-Rex a cabling system manufacturer. Based in Glenrothes, her job involves a fair amount of travelling.

Driving was uncomfortable and flying was a nightmare with take-off and landing sending excruciating pain through her neck and down her arm and back.

Away from work she used to enjoy riding her motorbike, tackling Munros and running to keep fit.

All of that had to go by the wayside.

"I had limited ability to turn my neck which meant riding my bike was impossible. And if I walked for more than 20 minutes I got a painful burning

sensation down my neck which spread down my arm and shoulders.

"I had many broken nights because I just couldn't get to sleep because of the pain. Sometimes I would just come home from work and lie on the floor as that was the most comfortable I could feel.

"I even had to get my long hair cut short as I didn't have the arm mobility to use the hairdryer to dry it!

"You don't actually realise how heavy your head is until your neck and back aren't working properly.

"I'm very stubborn though, and was determined I was going to keep going and the pain wasn't going to beat me."

Claire tried umpteen remedies.

"I've had physio, tried remedies like acupuncture and Chinese cupping and taken a lot of painkillers, both over the counter and prescribed.

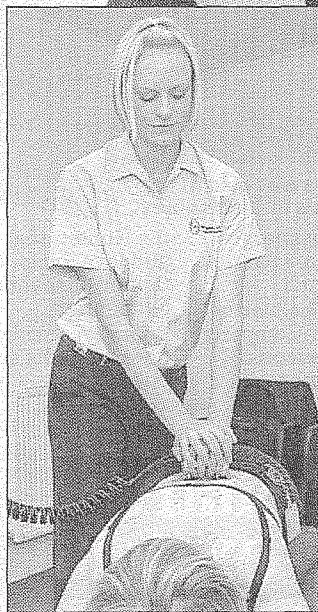
"At one stage I was even on morphine patches because the pain was so bad, but I also had to take anti-sickness tablets to combat the nausea they caused."

It wasn't a happy scenario and there seemed no respite in sight.

Then last July, Claire and her husband, Robert, went to the Rat Race adventure sports weekend in Edinburgh.

One of the stands on display in Princes Street Gardens was manned by Jeff Knox and Lyndsey Mountain from 21st Century Back Care in Edinburgh.

Their clinic treats people suffering back and neck pain with a device called TAMARS. It stands for Technology Assisted Micro-Mobilisation and Reflex Stimulation. It was designed by an engineer from Cornwall called Robert Taylor.



■ (Left) Lyndsey gets to work on Claire's back. (Inset) Jeff Knox.

pressure on the individual vertebra.

The clinic in Edinburgh opened just over a year ago and is the only one offering TAMARS in Scotland. A sister clinic in Northern Ireland is run by Jeff's dad and has been open for four years.

Jeff (27), explains, "TAMARS is a full spinal treatment which means we work from the base of the spine all the way up to the neck, ensuring all the joints of the spine are freed up and the vertebrae are straightened.

"Low back pain and sciatic pain are probably the most common complaints we see but we also treat a lot of people with spinal problems caused by sports injuries and pain from whiplash.

"The treatment can also help headache sufferers.

"Youngest patient I've ever treated was a 10-year-old who

had a bad fall at judo and the oldest has been about 85!

"The reason we can treat such a variety of ages and problems is that we're not just limited to one pressure mode on the handset. The nine different modes mean we can work extremely gently or work with a lot of pressure.

"On average a course of treatment normally lasts about

● A SPOKESMAN for the charity BackCare said, "There are hundreds of gadgets and gizmos on the market, all claiming to be the latest revolution in back pain treatment. Many of these products do actually help a lot of people, bringing at the very least temporary relief to their symptoms and sometimes a long-term solution.

"However, as much back pain can have many different causes it's impossible to find a treatment that will cure everyone. Some people will try a product or service and find it works fantastically for them, while others will try the same treatment and say it does absolutely nothing.

"The key is trial and error, to keep trying different products and services until you find the one that works for you, if TAMARS worked for Claire then that's one less person with back pain."

five to six sessions and we would hope the patient would start to feel the benefits after two or three sessions, depending on the problem and how long it had been there."

Claire decided to give the TAMARS a try and, with her fifth session approaching, she says the result is "miraculous".

"I was a bit sceptical about trying it for two reasons," she says. "First, I had had the injury for a long time and I was also slightly nervous it would make it worse before there was any benefit, like some of the treatments I've had.

Comfortable

"However, I found the one-hour treatment which was given to me by Lyndsey, very comfortable.

"After three treatments I could walk so much faster, and quite happily with no pain, and had the movement back in my neck. I've done five or six flights in the last fortnight and have felt no discomfort at all.

"I'm also going back out running again which is great."

"Apart from not longer having any pain the best thing has been the number of people who have said to me comments like 'you seem happy today'."

"In the last seven years the ever-present pain hasn't brought many comments like that my way!

● Treatment costs £65 for an hour-long session. For more information 21st Century Back Care 0131 557 4404.

