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HOMEOPATHY
Miracle cures or undiluted hogwash?

Gadget that can end your back pain

Bizarre gadget that can lengthen your spine in minutes

By **SHERRON MAYES**

WHEN Neil Summers was discharged from the Marines ten years ago because of his arthritic back, he was determined to find relief from the pain without resorting to surgery.

He developed a device that is helping thousands of sufferers of back pain and even correcting debilitating spinal conditions that might otherwise have required complex surgery.

Clinical trials of the Rola Back Stretcher show that with just 20 minutes' use of the device, there is significant therapeutic improvement for a variety of spinal dysfunctions. The results have been so good that some doctors, osteopaths and chiropractors are recommending the product.

Treatment of back pain costs the NHS more than £500 million each year, with 14 million GP consultations for back-related problems, according to the National Back Pain Association.

In Neil's case, the pain was caused by a condition called ankylosing spondylitis, where joints in the spine fuse together.

Now Neil is pain-free and has good posture. Although he will never be cured, he claims the device has allowed him to enjoy

Picture: CHRIS GORMAN



ROLL AWAY BACK PAIN

life. He believes it can help anyone who suffers from lower or middle back pain, bad posture, muscle spasm or restricted movement.

The back stretcher is a wooden curved device with a series of ten rollers. Patients lie on it and then slide over it, pausing for five minutes on each vertebra. The rollers put pressure on the muscles either side of the spine, which releases muscular tension. The curve of the device slightly arches

the back, elongating compressed spines.

The device was tested on 28 people with mild to chronic back pain in the Bilghoven Clinic in Holland by Dr J. Van Niekerk and physiotherapist Mark Van Straten.

The participants were all on some form of painkiller or anti-inflammatory tablet. Twenty-five were free of pain and able to work normally after four weeks.

Other results from a clinical trial

at the University of Iowa's spine centre in the U.S. showed that the back stretcher lengthened the spine by 1cm in just ten minutes.

Sandy Boniface, a chiropractor who works in Cranleigh Chiropractic Clinic in Surrey, says: 'Most of my clients have a multitude of neck and general back problems and I have recommended the back stretcher.'

'The responses I have had have been positive, particularly from

those patients with middle to lower back problems. It reduces the frequency of chiropractic treatment they need and complements the treatment I give them.'

Increasingly, back pain is being triggered by sedentary lifestyles, as people spend hours slouched at office desks.

Dr Deborah Skeil, a spinal rehabilitation consultant based in Sunderland, says: 'Many activities we do each day involve us bending forwards, so many people will eventually lose the full ability to bend backwards.'

'In extreme cases, it can result in dowager's hump, seen in some elderly people. The back stretcher isn't a cure for this, but it can help relieve many forms of back pain.'

Maggie Terrins, 33, a complementary therapist living in Surrey, has used the back stretcher to help with the pain of curvature of the spine.

'Though I didn't have a noticeable hump,' she says, 'I was in constant pain by my 20s and it seemed to get worse every year. My GP prescribed a painkiller, but I had to take time off work regularly to rest.'

'My mother heard about the back stretcher and suggested I give it a try. It relieved the pressure instantly. After a few weeks, the pain went altogether.'

■ The Rola Back Stretcher costs £79; www.thebackcoach.co.uk, 0870 753 3765.