

Perfect posture

KEITH BINGHAM IS now virtually ache and pain free thanks to postural alignment therapy

GOT a sore back? A sore hip? Perhaps you've also got a stiff neck. It's three decades since I raced and I've got all three. Well, I did have. Until I was introduced to postural alignment therapy methods, as devised in North America.

I kicked off with Pete Egoscue's therapy, called Egoscue. This is described as a 'revolutionary method for stopping chronic pain'. A couple of months into the Egoscue workouts, I was introduced to Muscle Balance Function (MBF), as devised by Geoff Gluckman.

Pete Egoscue is an anatomical physiologist. Geoff Gluckman is a Master of Science in biomechanics. I couldn't tell the difference. Both offer what appear, to my untutored brain, similar routines and both aim to cure a myriad of muscular problems and injuries.

Cycling Weekly first heard of Egoscue when Pamela Ann Jones, a postural alignment therapist and club cyclist in Kent, told fitness editor Hannah Reynolds about it. Pam was so thrilled by how much one of her clients had benefited, she wanted to tell the cycling world.

Hannah emailed the entire office asking for volunteers, and I stepped forward, offering my hip, back and neck. I bought a copy of Pete Egoscue's book, *Pain Free* — a revolutionary method for stopping chronic pain — and discovered that his exercise therapy programme is endorsed by golfing legend Jack Nicklaus.

The programme aims to treat chronic musculoskeletal pain,

caused by sports injuries, accidents and aging, and it consists of stretching and gentle exercises to restore full natural function to muscles and joints. Pam discovered the benefits of Egoscue herself while using it to treat her own tennis elbow and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Skeleton

She was so enthused she travelled to San Diego to be trained as an Egoscue therapist.

I told her my problems and she worked out a programme to deal with them. It wasn't long before I began to feel the benefits.

The programme consisted of exercise movements designed to straighten out my musculoskeletal frame. Being out of sync leads to some muscles having to over-compensate, becoming overloaded, causing pain and discomfort over the years.

The first four exercises were 'static back' — lying on my back. I started with five minutes of abdominal breathing; then sets of gluteal contractions; followed by knee pillow squeezes; and then reverse presses involving the shoulders. After this there were abdominal crunches and hip cross-over stretches. There's no need to go through the full list, but you get the picture.

Three months down the line, Pam decided to introduce me to another method, called Muscle Balance Function, as devised by Geoff Gluckman. As a result, my therapy programme has changed. Except, being an ignoramus in such matters, I can't really spot the difference between Egoscue and MBF.

“Being out of sync leads to some muscles having to over-compensate, becoming overloaded, causing pain and discomfort for years”



Not all about the bike

Investing some time in off the bike exercises will pay you back with improved posture and pain-free cycling.

“Within days of starting the Egoscue programme, I’m noting less stiffness in my hip. Within one week, the pain sitting up in bed after a night’s sleep has gone”

Keith’s diary

May 2007

For the past 12 months, my left hip has felt sore and stiff each morning after waking and it has been painful getting out of bed. Although the pain would abate after a stretching routine, the stiffness would return the following morning.

My other problem has been with me much longer; a stiff neck, aggravated, I thought, by 45 years of riding in the crouched position on a racing bike. Looking back over my shoulder had also become a problem and I was no longer comfortable getting down into the hocks.

Within days of starting the Egoscue programme devised for me by Pam – a 20-minute workout each morning before the dog woke up – I am noting less stiffness in my hip. Within one week, the pain of sitting up in bed after a night’s sleep has gone. I am still a little stiff, but nothing like before.

Four days into the programme, I set off for a local bike ride and noticed something different. Within a few pedal strokes, I wondered if I was on the same bike. I felt more balanced. How to describe this? I felt I was sat all-square over the pedals, if that makes sense. I was conscious of making equal pedal thrusts. I felt more comfortable. And this new feeling has translated to standing, too, and walking.

POSTURAL PROBLEMS

Therapist checklist

FIRST of all, the therapist took stock of my posture. To do this, I wore only shorts, no shirt or shoes, as she needed to see knees, shoulders and back. I stood against a plumb line on the wall and photographs were taken of me facing her, with my back turned, facing to the left, facing to the right.

From the shots you could see my shoulder drooped. I stood with more weight on one side than the other. I had rounded shoulders. Not a pretty picture and I was unaware of all this.

The therapy is all about correcting postural alignment, with sets of exercises designed to straighten you out.

Egoscue describes the body as a first-rate mechanism battered by second-rate treatment. In our modern, labour-saving age, most people simply don’t allow the body to work as it is meant to do.

We take the lift not the stairs, we catch the bus or jump in the car rather than walk 10 minutes down the road, thus denying our legs, lungs and heart a good workout. The maxim ‘use it or lose it’ says it all. Neglected, our body becomes dysfunctional, weakens and begins to fail.

Sitting is by far the worst offender, as we lounge in chairs and sit hunched over our desks. The *Cycling Weekly* page designers, slumped before their computers, are disasters waiting to happen. Sitting in cars is another major cause of postural problems.

Although athletes are less at risk because of their active lifestyles, they can become sloppy away from their sport. And during sport, athletes are of course susceptible to muscle injury and pain.

My therapist followed up her initial assessment of my posture by picking a selection of exercises designed to correct my imbalance, which aimed to allow my musculoskeletal frame to get back into shape and back into its natural position. This in itself would have a positive effect on my problems.

Both Egoscue and MBF aim to address the underlying musculoskeletal dysfunctions, and the exercise programmes must be followed sequentially, in the order presented.

Once the problems clear up, the therapist will change the exercise programme into a maintenance routine.

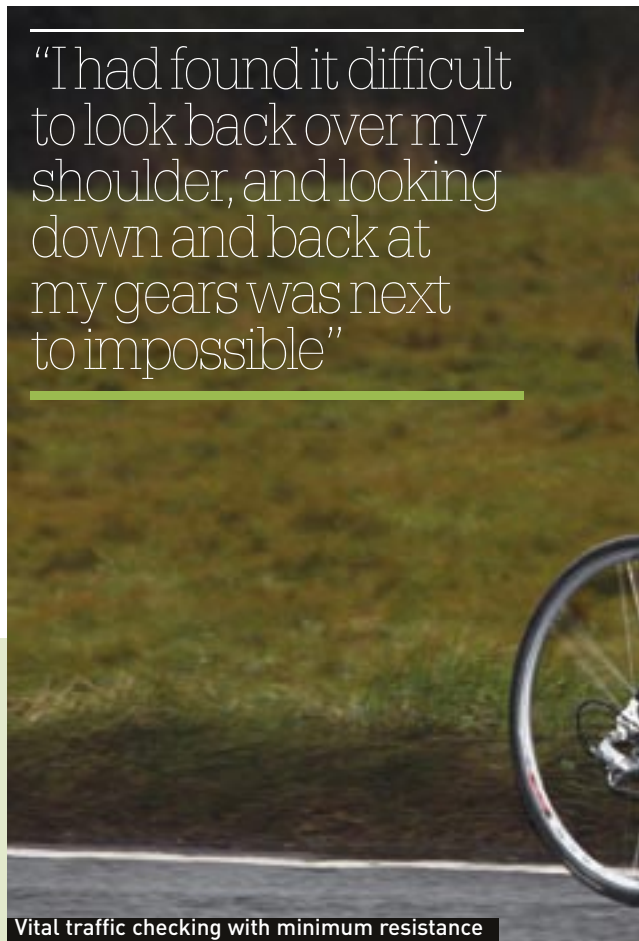
“Egoscue describes the body as a first-rate mechanism battered by second-rate treatment”

Keith's diary

June 2007

The neck problem has been taking longer to sort out. Although I detected some improvement initially, it seemed now and again to feel worse. However, after a short time this too eased, to the point where I'd get back home and realise I'd turned my head quite a few times as usual at junctions, but without the usual feeling of restriction. A few weeks on and I have now begun to feel a little more comfortable riding in the drops for a short time.

Three weeks into the regime, however, after a ride home from work into a stiff headwind, an old knee injury made itself felt. Many years ago, I had overdone it in a finishing bunch gallop on an evening training ride down the North Circular in London. It was too early in the season - I stretched the muscles over my knee cap. Next day the pain was excruciating. I'll tell Pam about this when I report for my next assessment.



"I had found it difficult to look back over my shoulder, and looking down and back at my gears was next to impossible"

Vital traffic checking with minimum resistance

GET WITH THE PROGRAMME

Keith's exercises

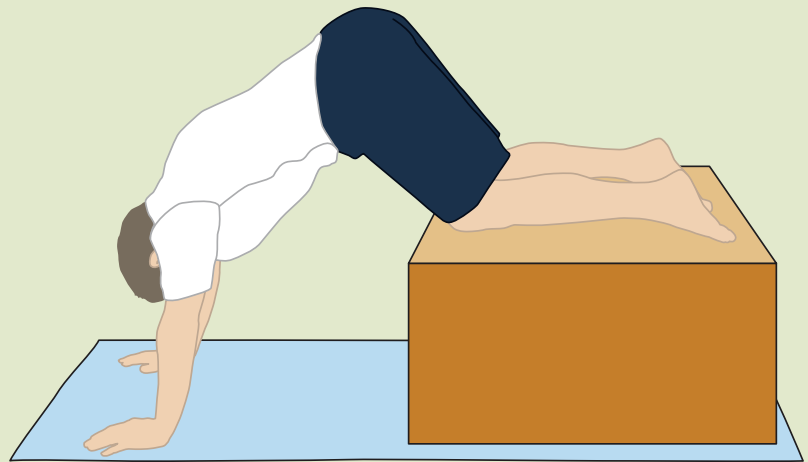
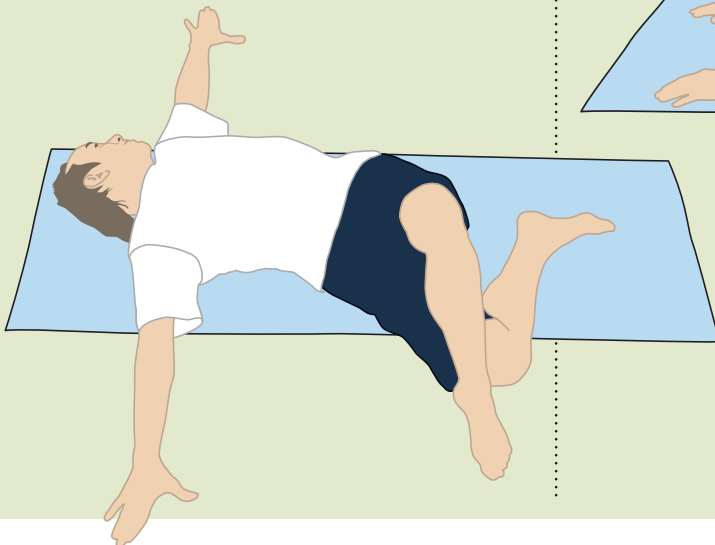
Hip crossover stretch with palms down

To begin, lie on your back with both knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Arms are placed out to the side with palms pressed down on the floor.

The left ankle is then crossed over the right knee, which is then pressed out and away from the body until flat on the floor. The left knee remains bent with the foot flat on the floor. Keep the left knee pressed away from the body to feel a stretch in the left hip area. Hold for 30 seconds to one minute, then reverse the motion and repeat on the opposite side.

What it does:

In MBF this is used for targeting a hip disparity. This exercise will often follow the 'hip lift'. If someone has either a hip rotation or elevation, or even an excessive pelvic tilt, these exercises can correct it.



Static extension

Kneel on a large block (or chair) with hands on the floor ahead of you. Keep your elbows locked straight and move hips three inches forward of knees. The lower back should arch, with the movement coming from the tilt of the pelvis. Shoulder blades should collapse together, elbows kept straight, head dropped. Build up to holding this for two minutes.

What it does:

Promotes lumbar and thoracic extension through bilateral hip demand.



July 2007

Pam considered it possible that in correcting my pelvic posture, the hip or knee was operating differently, exposing the weakness in the knee. But she felt the ride had caused the injury, not the exercise routine. She told me a new exercise programme would address the problem with the knee, and she changed a few of the exercises. But after five days on this new menu, I noticed my hip was becoming sore again.

Pam changed the menu again, increasing the number of exercises from nine to 10. "I think we need to go for more hip stability in a different way," she said.

She brought back in the Hooklying Knee Pillow Squeezes (a) from my first menu, and introduced Hooklying Abductor Presses (b) and Standing Arm Circles (c). If these exercises sound complex, believe me they are not. You soon learn them.

And voila, within days the soreness in my hip each morning had eased considerably. I could swing out of bed no problem.

Two weeks later and my neck began to feel much less stiff. Previously, I had found it difficult to look back over my shoulder to check traffic, and looking down and back at my gears was next to impossible without it feeling as if I had a metal splint in there, it was just so stiff and sore. But after several weeks, these symptoms have eased considerably, so that I can now look back with only a minimum of resistance.

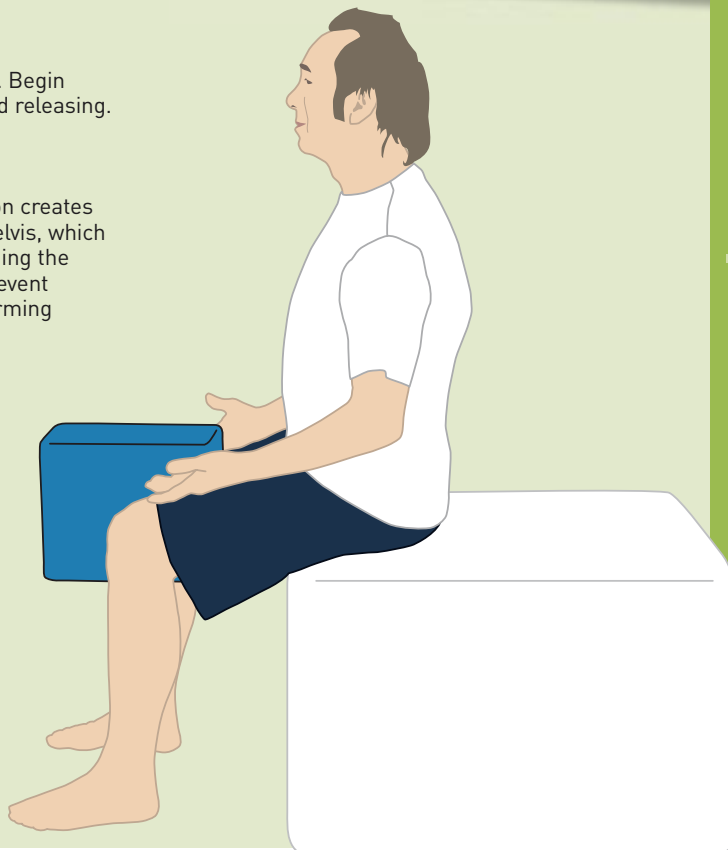
As for the knee injury, though it took longer to sort out, a few weeks on and I no longer notice it at all.

Static back knee pillow squeezes

Sit with arms out at 45 degrees, palms up. Begin squeezing knees inward into the pillow and releasing. Do three sets of 20.

What it does:

Stabilises the pelvis bilaterally. The position creates a horizontal load between shoulder and pelvis, which contributes to thoracic extension by engaging the stabilisers and flexors of the hip. Helps prevent compensation from occurring when performing other types of muscular work.



"A few weeks on, and I have now begun to feel a little more comfortable riding in the drops for a short time"

Fit for purpose

A correctly fitting bike is only part of the story when it comes to finding your optimal riding position. Work with your body to get a more comfortable, powerful and aerodynamic position.

THE MINDS BEHIND IT ALL

Who are these guys?

PETE Egoscue is described by therapist Pamela Ann Jones as a genius who can look at you and know intuitively what will work for you. And he's surrounded by people who have the same understanding.

"It's a fantastic method," she said.

Pete Egoscue has been an anatomical physiologist since 1978 and operates from San Diego. Egoscue treats chronic musculoskeletal pain attributed to workplace and sports injuries.

In his book *Pain Free*, Pete Egoscue says: "Much of the success of the Egoscue method is based on its ability to reconnect individuals to their innate kinesthetic sense, or muscle memory, of how things feel beneath the surface..."

To show how much I don't know of such things, let me tell you that the last time I came across the word 'kinetic' was on the title of Roger Ruskin Spear's album, *Kinetic Wardrobe*. For those children not of the 1970s, Spears was from the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band era, the wild bunch fronted by that ginger geezer, Vivian Stanshall.

Pam was equally inspired by Geoff Gluckman, who is a Master of Science in Biomechanics. Muscle Balance Function, which he developed, is based on the scientific principles of biomechanics, she told me. "Phone him up," she said. So I did.

Geoff told me he was involved with Egoscue years ago, before setting up MBF.

"MBF is based on the laws of physics," he told me. "You are following the three principles of Newtonian physics. The key with MBF is the correct sequence of the exercises you do," he said.

I did some homework and learnt that biomechanics has to do with the mechanics of tissues, joints, and human movement. It can be applied to a range of clinical problems, from serious illnesses such as diabetes, to the mechanisms of sports injury. From this can come the development of innovative rehabilitation.

Biomechanics also has to do with 'kinectivity' in the body. Kinetics is another name for dynamics, the branch of mechanics, including both dynamics and kinematics, concerned with the study of bodies in motion.

It is most important to take people back into themselves, to rediscover the power of their centre of gravity, Gluckman told me. "It all began for me when I was 13, into martial arts," Gluckman said, "I realised it was most important for the body to be aligned, to feel that sense of gravity."

Well, I get that. And I can say, happily, that I've benefited from both Egoscue and MBF. So, thanks everyone. You scored with this punter.

For more information go to: www.egoscue.com or www.musclebalancefunction.com
To contact Pamela Ann Jones email: ashtangipam@yahoo.co.uk

Static extension for the lumbar and thoracic regions



Find a practitioner

An Egoscue or MBF practitioner will assess your posture and put together the right programme

Keith's diary

September 2007

Come September, Pam told me she wanted to give me a new programme; the Muscle Balance Function programme. She has given me a new set of exercises, some being a variation of exercises from the previous programme, and I need to do 25 minutes each day. Within days I was out on the bike. On a descent, I moved my hands from the brake hoods into the drops as usual, and something felt different. I could go deeper into the drops; my back was flatter.

Previously, I'd felt too stiff to stay down there for more than a minute or so; it felt as if someone had shoved a plank up my shirt. Blimey; suddenly the plank has gone! It's almost like the old days, getting down to it in a road race or a time trial!

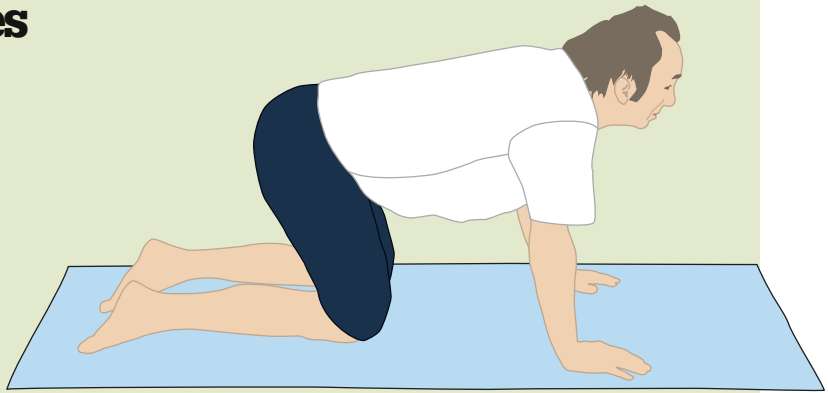
Recently, Pam said to me: "I have just been looking at your photographs, I can see you are standing straighter, your stance is narrower as well, indicating more pelvic stability. People adopt a wide stance when they don't have the support from the pelvic and torso musculature. Your head and shoulders have come back as well, more towards the gravity line. And I think possibly there is a change in the angle of the pelvis."

GET WITH THE PROGRAMME

Keith's exercises

Cats and Dogs

On your hands and knees. Cat: pull hips under, pull your head under and push your upper back to the ceiling. Dog: roll your hips forward to put the arch in your back, collapse shoulder blades together and look up. Repeat. One set of 10.



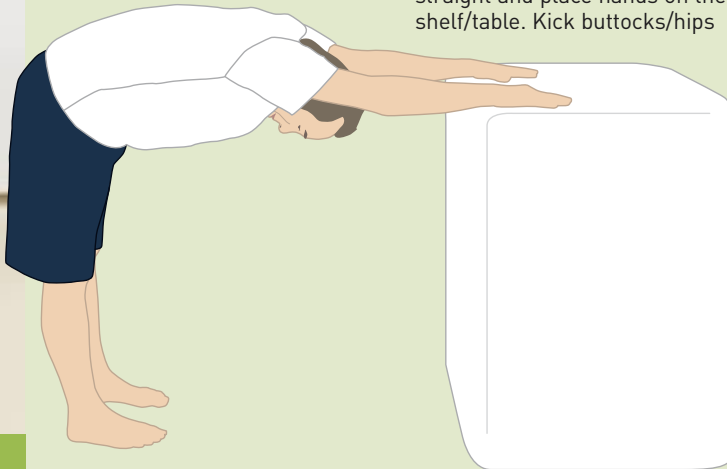
What it does:

Promotes bilateral spine flexion and extension while loading the shoulder and hip joints.

Counter stretch

Stand facing a waist-high shelf or table. Keep feet pointed straight and place hands on the shelf/table. Kick buttocks/hips

back to place an arch in the lower back. Keep elbows locked out and tighten quads. Hold for one minute.



What it does:

Promotes trunk extension while keeping vertical lower load joint demands.

“I moved my hands from the brake hoods into the drops as usual, and something felt different. I could go deeper into the drops; my back was flatter”

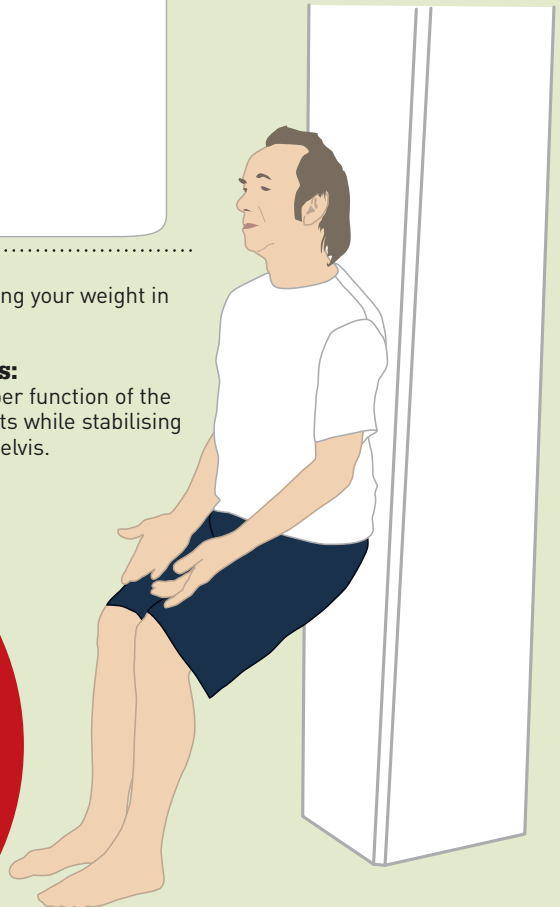
Airbench

Stand against a wall with feet pointing ahead. Hips, upper back and head should be against the wall. Walk approximately two feet away. Bend knees and start sliding down the wall. Hold this position for two

minutes, keeping your weight in your heels.

What it does:

Promotes proper function of the lower load joints while stabilising the opposing pelvis.



Up with the lark

You don't have to dedicate a huge amount of time to these exercises and they can all be done at home. Keith Bingham chose to spend 25 minutes first thing in the morning going through his routine. This got them done and out of the way without interfering with his day-to-day lifestyle.