

HEALTH

Body and soul

Physiotherapist Helen Preston is expanding her Peterborough clinic to include new, complementary therapies such as Mindfulness training.
Words: Lucy Banwell
Photo: Tim Steele

When Helen Preston decided to follow a career in physiotherapy it was the most natural choice in the world. Not only was her father, William, a well-known physiotherapist in the Peterborough area - having set up the clinic which Helen now runs - her grandfather, Albert, was the physio for Peterborough United for 25 years.

"People still come up to me and say, 'Was your grandad the Posh physio?'," laughs Helen. 'I've also had patients tell me they saw me take my first steps in the clinic because I grew up in the house where my dad had his treatment rooms. There are pictures of me aged four dressed up as a nurse helping out!'"

Since taking over the practice in 2000 when her father retired, Helen has built on his reputation in the physiotherapy world to create a modern clinic which now offers treatments such as acupuncture, podiatry and sports massage alongside its core physiotherapy work. The majority of Helen's clients come to her for help with back pain or sports injuries but she also treats younger patients as the physio-in-residence at Oundle School and The Peterborough School.

The expanded clinic, which now employs eight physios, underwent a complete rebranding last year to reflect the multi-disciplinary approach the practice now adopts.

"We're now known as Prestons Health rather than Prestons Physiotherapy Clinic because it better encompasses all that we do," explains Helen. "We take a holistic view of a client's problem and all of us at Prestons Health are committed to working within our own scope of practice. People often come to us without having seen a doctor first so we effectively have to triage them and decide whether it is within our scope to treat their ailment. We work very closely with consultant orthopaedic surgeons and rheumatologists and often refer patients on to them.

"We tend to look at the whole picture - lifestyle, physical activity, sleep quality. The latter is often a key cause of why people have health issues. One of the biggest risk factors for back pain, for example, is insufficient sleep.



There's a real health promotional side to what we do which is why we've introduced additional services such as our yoga classes which can be really helpful with stress and how that manifests itself within the body."

Another add-on now offered at Prestons Health is the latest buzzword in complementary therapy - Mindfulness training. "It's essentially about being in the present moment," says Helen. "Rather than thinking about the past or worrying about the future it's about being in the now. It's a deep training for the mind and it helps us gain a resilience for life.

"Mindfulness has a really strong evidence base. Studies have shown that after eight weeks of mindfulness training, physical changes can be found within the brain."

It's crucial to Helen that any alternative therapies offered at Prestons Health are scientifically proven to be effective. Helen is keen to expand the business further to include additional treatments where appropriate, and she's also hoping to open a sister clinic in the future - possibly in Stamford.

"I've come to the conclusion that in order to have good quality health and a good sense of vitality we need to be training the body and the mind," says Helen. "If you're training both then you're going to be functioning well both physically and emotionally. And essentially that's what good health is all about."

What is Mindfulness?

The term 'Mindfulness' refers to a practice which combines meditation and breathing techniques to increase awareness of the present moment. It is thought that by becoming more aware of our thoughts and feelings we become better equipped to deal with them. The practice can be particularly beneficial for patients with depression, anxiety and addiction, and it has also been shown to have a positive effect on physical problems such as chronic pain or fibromyalgia.

"I believe that mindfulness can benefit everybody," says Helen Preston. "All my staff at the clinic have received mindfulness training and I use it myself to help cope with a busy lifestyle managing two young children, a business and my work as a physio."

• The next Mindfulness course at Prestons Health is a two-part workshop hosted by experienced practitioner Barbara Reid on 18th March and 1st April 10am-midday at the Alexandra Road clinic.

• For more information contact Prestons Health on 01733 565911 www.prestonshealth.co.uk