



SENSEABILITY

A newsletter of applications
of the FELDENKRAIS
METHOD® of somatic
education written by *Guild
Certified Feldenkrais
Teachers®*

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STRESS Reduction

Recognize, Relax and Recover

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Stress is a fact of everyday living – it’s here to stay, and we need to learn to recognize it. With more knowledge about how to relax, we can learn to recover from stress. Step One is increasing our awareness of the various stress factors in our lives and how stress manifests in our bodies. Some stresses are long-term and chronic—an unhappy job situation, financial worries, or difficult relationships, or perhaps you periodically suffer from allergies or food sensitivities that have plagued you for years.

Acute stress comes in the form of a blow-up with a loved one, a car accident, or nervousness about an important job interview. And there are other, less obvious forms of stress—thermal ones like stepping from hot, humid outdoor weather into an ice-cold air-conditioned restaurant. And chemical ones like junk food, caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and other drugs, as well as environmental factors like smog.

So, begin by learning to recognize the various stressors in your life and decide if there are some that you can eliminate. It’s equally important to acknowledge those that you can’t do much about. Sometimes, you’ll find that you become overstressed because there’s just a little bit of stress coming at you—from each of the different categories. At first it seems like there’s nothing particularly huge to point to, but it’s the cumulative effect of many small amounts of stress—chronic and acute—that bring you to the brink of exhaustion.

Another aspect of the recognition step is to learn to observe the physical manifestations of stress, particularly in the early warning stages. Insomnia, shallow breathing, grinding your teeth at night, stomach aches, headaches, anxiety, are

all physical clues that indicate you need to be practicing Step Two—options for relaxing, in the moment—that can help bring you back to a place of homeostasis, or balance.

Increasing your awareness of these factors in your life has to be the first step. Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, an Israeli physicist and educator, said, **“If you don’t know what you’re doing, you can’t do what you want.”** A recent newspaper article warned that people are assuming they can handle stress with isolated blocks of relaxation like weekend getaways and evening yoga classes. Instead, the suggestion was made that we need to learn to handle stress as it happens, by changing the way we react to it.

Dr. Feldenkrais, who lived from 1904-1984, developed **a series of movement explorations to help us learn to recognize our physical habits and introduce more efficient, healthy patterns.** Many of the lessons he created involve physical functions such as reaching, bending, turning and walking, and many of them involve more subtle functions like breathing and becoming aware of the tension patterns we have developed.

These simple breathing and movement explorations can be practiced anytime, anywhere, and in just a few minutes, help you recognize the tension in your body, relax, and recover. The process of increasing awareness and exploring new choices for yourself is something that can easily be learned and practiced so that you can approach life with health and resilience. ●●

—by Barbara Leverone, GCFT,
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Our Bodily Stress Response and the *Feldenkrais Method*[®]

Stress impacts the health of our body and mind—often in negative ways. The *Feldenkrais Method* offers a fun and effective way to improve the way that we deal with stress.

Most people would agree that stress is a common consequence of living and working in today's fast-paced world. There are many "causes" for stress—for some it is the war, or the threat of terrorism, economic uncertainty, work pressures, family and relationship dynamics, health issues, etc. Yet stress is not something purely caused by outside forces, rather it is an internal response either to outside events or simply our own emotions. This response involves increases in muscular tension, blood pressure, the release of certain hormones such as adrenaline, and the interruption of normal breathing; ways of moving, healing, relaxation, and digestive functions. Our own personal bodily stress response is to a large extent a habit; and when approached as such can be improved. We have built into our nervous system, ways of recognizing and moving towards comfort and ease, and away from stress. These anti-stress mechanisms can be accessed if we use the power of our awareness to break unconscious and habitual responses to stress.

Personal Stress Pattern Awareness Through Movement[®] Lesson

Sit in a chair—preferably one that's not too padded or soft. Notice the way that you are making contact with the chair—with your buttocks, your legs, and possibly with your back and shoulders, and how your feet are resting on the floor. Notice your breath—what is the quality of your breath, how easy is it? Where does the breath go?

Now think of a problem, something that's an issue for you, something that's bugging you. Focus on that situation. What feelings come up? What judgments do you have? What would you like to do about it? Now notice your body—are there any changes from a minute ago?

Do you have more or less connection with the ground, the chair? How is your breathing? Is it different? Is it tight or restricted anywhere? Where exactly? Are there any muscles that feel tighter? Where? Often people will feel it in their neck or chest or belly. Are there any changes in your posture? See if you can take in these bodily stress responses as a whole—it is your individual stress response pattern. This response is natural—it is wired into each of our nervous systems. Problems arise when we have this response excessively or inappropriately, or when it becomes ingrained in our body. Rest in sitting for a few moments.

Now again think of the stressful situation, notice your bodily response to the stress. And now, could you exaggerate this physical response? Wherever you are tightening, do it more. However your posture is changing, do more. If there was less breathing going on, do less again. And stay with that for a minute. Then let it go, and sit and rest for a minute.

Now re-check your contact with the chair and the floor, and with your breathing. These cues can serve as an anchor, as a way back to inner comfort. Think again about the stressful situation. But only think of the stress for as long as you remain aware of your contact with the floor, the chair, and your easy breath. As soon as you lose these anchors, detach from the stress, regain your inner comfort, and then try again.

After some practice with this ATM you may find that you don't respond as strongly or as often to stress, and that you can go back to normal more easily after a stressful event. In the course of your day, if you notice tension or stress in your body, try this process as a way to help relieve that stress. ●●

—by Andrew Wright, GCFT, <agordian@yahoo.com>
(Our bodily stress response and the *Feldenkrais Method*, and the Personal Stress Pattern ATM are excerpted from Andrew Wright's upcoming book about the role of our body sensations in how we think, feel, and move.)

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Three Easy “Peaces” for Deep Relaxation and Stress Relief

Take All the Time You Need for Each Breath

The whole world may be hurried, worried and harried, but you don't have to be. Here's a way to get yourself from rush hour to hush hour in no time flat.

Step 1. Sit or lie in any comfortable position.

Close your eyes if you like.

Step 2. Now, breathe easy, and take all the time you need for each breath. That means, take all the time you need to breathe in. Take all the time you need to breathe out. Take all the time you need between breaths. Make no effort to breathe deeply or in any special way. Simply take all the time you need for each breath.

Step 3. Continue for three to five minutes or more.

Step 4. Rest quietly for a few minutes. Feel the result of what you have done. When your breathing becomes truly unhurried, your whole body relaxes and your mind becomes calm and clear.

Main Squeeze

Your “main squeeze” is that special someone you rely on for physical comforting and emotional support when you need it most. But what if that person is absent or unavailable? What if you're alone? You can be your own main squeeze! Just follow the steps below.

Step 1. Sit or lie down for a few moments with your eyes closed. As before, take all the time you need for each breath.

Step 2. Grasp one thumb with the opposite hand.

Step 3. Slowly inhale, and as you do so, gently, gradually squeeze your thumb. Slowly exhale and as you do so, gradually relax the squeeze and let your hands be still. Repeat three to five times—slowly inhale, squeeze your thumb, slowly exhale, relax.

Synchronize the squeezing movement with your breath. That means, however long it takes to inhale, that's how long it takes to gradually apply that gentle squeezing pressure to your thumb. However long it takes to exhale, that's how long it takes to gradually relax your grip on the thumb.

Step 4. Rest quietly for several complete breath cycles (inhale/exhale). Feel the effect of what you have done.

Step 5. Repeat the same procedure for each of the other fingers. Squeeze the index finger, the middle finger,

the ring finger, the little finger. Be sure to synchronize the movements with your breath. Rest for several breath cycles after each series of movements.

Tranquil Eyes

Closing your eyes is a signal to your body to quiet down, relax, and rest. But sometimes, even though your eyes are closed, they remain tense and restless, and so do you. Here's a remarkably effective way to bring your eyes to a state of profound repose. When your eyes are truly in repose, so are you.

Step 1. Sit or lie down for a few moments with your eyes closed. As before, take all the time you need for each breath.

Step 2. Now, slowly inhale, and as you do so, very gently raise your eyes a little bit as if you were looking up. Your eyelids remain softly closed, and you raise your eyes behind the closed lids.

Step 3. Then, whenever you're ready, slowly exhale and allow your eyes to come to rest. Repeat this movement three to five times, synchronizing the movement of your eyes with your breath.

Note: If you feel any discomfort at all in moving your eyes like that, please raise your eyes in your imagination only. For our purposes, imaginary eye movements are just as effective as real ones.

Step 4. Now, rest quietly with your eyes closed for three to five complete breath cycles (inhale/exhale) and simply feel. Many people report that the volume of their thoughts is considerably reduced, and their minds become very still. See what you discover.

Step 5. Repeat as desired. Be sure to rest after each set of three to five movements.

Note: You may combine all three techniques for even greater benefit. Taking all the time you need for each breath, slowly inhale, squeeze your thumb, raise your eyes up. Slowly exhale, relax your grip, relax your eyes. Repeat for all five fingers.

These deceptively simple practices can make all the difference in the way you feel. Practice for three to five minutes, three times a day. Your thoughts will become more positive, your creativity will flourish, and you will see a more beautiful person in the mirror. ●●

—by Michael Krugman, M.A., GCFT,
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“The idea stuck in my head, and I taught it to my children—that any situation in life that's negative, there is something positive you can do with it.

‘Use the difficulty’—it's like a motto in our family.”

—Michael Caine, actor, from an interview in AARP Magazine, May/June, 2003

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Products based on the *Feldenkrais Method*
available from the FEFNA Bookstore:

Feldenkrais®: The Busy Person's Guide to Easier Movement, by Frank Wildman, Ph.D. Fifty ways to achieve a happy, painfree and intelligent body through common sense lessons based on *Awareness Through Movement* lessons.
Book, Product No. 3123, \$14.95, plus shipping and handling.

Unwinding My Tension, Osa Jackson-Wyatt, Ph.D., PT. Gentle movement patterns guide you to increased self-awareness of balance and motion.
Video, Product No. 5118, \$34.95, plus shipping and handling.

Awareness Heals, Steven Shafarman. Discusses the *Feldenkrais Method* and includes six basic ATM lessons to help you become more aware of how you breathe, sit, walk and move.
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