

Alexander Technique Students

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Body Basics

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Most people come to me because of back, neck, or joint pain. Some other conditions are headaches, vocal nodes, and hypertension. For people of all ages, Alexander Technique provides an opportunity for change that is safe, painless, and highly effective. It is a body-based educational process developed by F.M. Alexander a century ago.

Almost all of us have habits of unnecessary tension. Unable to sense ourselves reliably, we create strain, imbalance, and eventually pain in our musculoskeletal systems. We compress our torsos, forcing vital organs to work under pressure. This changes how we breathe, digest, and circulate fluids. Even our thinking is affected.

Observe an infant sitting perfectly upright on the floor. Or watch how easily a toddler squats. At some point—often as early as kindergarten—we began to tighten our necks, lift our shoulders, slump, and talk without breathing. I help people unlearn harmful habits so they can regain some of their innate coordination and ease.

Sometimes the results are dramatic. Until trying Alexander Technique, 42-year-old Kent D. “could not remember a time without neck pain.” After his third week of lessons he gave up pain killers and muscle relaxers and told me, “I haven’t felt this good in twenty years.”

With delicate touch, students are guided through simple activities like walking, sitting, and getting up and down. Manually and verbally, I teach them to sense what they are doing so they can let go of inefficient effort. We continue with some work on a table, and then sometimes explore activities of their choice, such as writing, lifting a heavy load, swinging a racket, or shoveling snow. They discover freer breathing and movement. Step by step, they learn how to continue this process on their own.

Mary M. C. suffered “severe back pain . . . shooting pain” and was “perpetually uncomfortable.” She rightly suspected it had something to do with how she worked at her computer. “After only two lessons the pain disappeared and has not returned,” she says. She now uses Alexander Technique to manage asthma. “I am learning how to breathe

... This has not only lessened my need for medications, but has taught me how to relieve strain on my lungs and chest muscles during an attack.” In addition, “the psychological effect” of the work “brings a deep sense of relaxation . . . real peace in the middle of a crazy day.”

Flutist and music copyist Jennifer Y. M. experienced pain both playing the flute and at the computer. “Not only has the Alexander Technique helped eliminate that pain but it has enhanced my skills as a flutist,” she says. “My breathing has been improved, my technique has become more fluid and the quality of my sound is more refined. Performances have changed as well: “I can concentrate on my music, not on my nerves.”

Sometimes people contact me after years of pain, fear, and frustration. The case of Gary V., Ph.D., is not uncommon. “I suffered from dysfunction of the jaw for over ten years, resulting in chronic neck pain, many headaches, and worn teeth. After years of dental work and physical therapy, I felt better, but I was not ‘cured’ and my symptoms would mysteriously appear and disappear.” He was reluctant to try Alexander Technique. “I was skeptical, being a hard-core scientist.”

His first session surprised him. “I immediately realized that my way of doing things was out of whack and terribly stressful to my body. I began to notice the incredible tension in my neck.” With each session, Gary “felt more relief and could function for longer periods of time without pain.” Like 95 per cent of my students, he successfully applies Alexander’s principles on his own. “My self-awareness is increased and I am in better control of my mental and physical state, especially when difficult situations arise. I used to be in pain all day with no relief. A year later I am nearly pain free.”

Among Alexander Technique’s many students and supporters are two Nobel laureates in medicine/physiology, as well as Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Kevin Kline, Paul McCartney, Aldous Huxley, and John Dewey. Eight international societies maintain standards for certification and teacher-training courses.