



Feldenkrais®
A C C E S S

User's Guide



The Feldenkrais
Method®
&
Awareness
Through Movement®

What is it
How it works
&
How to Maximize
the Benefits



About the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education

The Feldenkrais Method is a synthesis of biology, physics, neuroscience, and motor development, designed to interact with the brain's neuroplasticity to benefit the body. It uses a combination of functionally relevant movement and relaxed attention to improve comfort and function.

The Feldenkrais Method is available in two different ways: as do-it-yourself exercises called Awareness Through Movement®, and as individual hands-on sessions called Functional Integration®. Both are commonly referred to as “lessons” because a learning process takes place in your brain and body when you do them.

The Feldenkrais Method can help you to change habitual patterns of posture and self-use, improve your musculoskeletal organization, and improve your physical comfort, ease of movement, and sense of well-being. Feldenkrais lessons are extremely safe, gentle, and suitable for people of all ages and abilities.

Awareness Through Movement® (ATM®) Lessons

Awareness Through Movement is the do-it-yourself aspect of the Feldenkrais Method. It uses a combination of gentle movement and relaxed attention to engage your brain's neuroplasticity on your body's behalf. Awareness Through Movement can begin making a positive difference right away.

Before You Begin

Turn off distracting electronics and find a firm, flat place where you can lie down comfortably. You can use a rug, mat, or blanket to make the floor more comfortable. If it is difficult for you to lie on the floor, you can do the exercise while lying flat on a bed (without a pillow). Remove your shoes and belt, and loosen any tight or restrictive clothing. If you are doing an ATM lesson that involves a sitting position, please select a chair with a flat, firm seat, and sit toward its forward edge. Your feet should be able to rest flat on the floor.

What to Expect

Awareness Through Movement lessons work in an unusual way. Instead of using muscular effort, they rely upon small, gentle movements done in a relaxed way to facilitate communication between your brain and body. They are most effective when you go slowly, do less, avoid discomfort, and respect your own internal senses. During the lesson, while you do the movements, the teacher will provide verbal guidance and suggestions. When the lesson is over, you may find that changes have taken place in your posture, ease and quality of movement, and overall sense of well-being. Some improvements will be immediate while others will occur gradually over time, as you continue to explore the Feldenkrais Method.

Do Each Movement Slowly

Go slowly and take your time to sense and feel the details of each movement. Doing the movements slowly will make it easier to reduce unnecessary muscular effort and strain. It will also make it easier for your brain to explore new options for improvement. Going slowly helps to make important sensory information more accessible to your brain so that it can use it to improve your body's advantage.

Don't be Hard on Yourself

For optimal results, refrain from making an effort to succeed because emotional effort makes us use more muscular effort than necessary. Give yourself permission to take a break from being goal-oriented. Do not attempt to 'correct' your body in any way, and if you are in a Feldenkrais class, don't compare your movements to the movements of your classmates. Simply relax and experience the lesson without judging yourself. The Feldenkrais Method is not competitive; no one is better at doing a Feldenkrais lesson than anyone else.

Reduce Unnecessary Effort

It is extremely common to use more muscular effort than necessary, even in simple movements and tasks. When you're doing a Feldenkrais lesson, try to use as little effort as possible when you do the movements. Use only the small amount of muscular effort that is truly necessary. This will make it easier for your brain to detect small but important differences, and make helpful neurological distinctions.

Do Only What is Easy

In Awareness Through Movement, each movement should be easy and comfortable. Do not push, stretch, strain, or use intense muscular effort, and please do not do any movements that cause pain or discomfort. Movements of only an inch or two can be extremely effective. Do not do any movements that cause discomfort.

Pause Between Each Small Movement

Do not repeat the movements quickly, one after another. It is more effective to pause and relax completely for a few seconds between each movement. This will help you to stay relaxed and gives your brain time to absorb new and useful sensory information.

Resting Is Important

Fatigue increases muscular effort and interferes with your brain's ability to communicate successfully with your body. Therefore, rest as often as you like during a Feldenkrais lesson. Resting can be as helpful as doing the movements, refreshing your system and giving you an opportunity to notice the changes that are taking place. Please feel free to pause the video or audio recording whenever you like, until you are ready to continue.

Go at Your Own Pace

Feldenkrais lessons are flexible and all about you as an individual. Therefore, please take your time and go at your own pace. If you find some movements particularly interesting, feel free to pause the recording and do them as many times as you like. If you feel any strain or fatigue, please pause to rest and resume the exercise when you are ready to continue.

Avoid Pain and Discomfort

You should not experience discomfort or pain while doing Awareness Through Movement. Respect your body's signals and do not do any movements that cause pain or discomfort. Instead, try making the movements even smaller and slower, or do them only in your imagination. Discomfort after a Feldenkrais lesson may indicate that you used more muscular effort than necessary. Please rest and try doing even less next time.

Visualization

When you imagine or visualize doing a movement, your brain sends the same exact messages to your muscles that it sends when you are actually moving. The only difference is that the messages are not intense enough to make your muscles contract fully. If you like, try closing your eyes and doing the movements in your imagination only. In some situations, this can be as effective as physically doing the movements.

When the Lesson is Over: How to Maximize the Benefits

When you do an Awareness Through Movement lesson, some of your old, habitual patterns become flexible, and your brain and body has an opportunity to access new options for your posture, movement, and self-use. When the lesson is over, you may notice a wide range of changes and improvements in your body and posture, ease and range of movement, breathing, and sense of well-being. To enjoy the fullest rewards, when the lesson is over, take some time to notice the changes that have taken place.

Your awareness in the hours immediately following a Feldenkrais lesson is powerful and can help to maximize the lesson's effectiveness. After doing a Feldenkrais lesson, pay attention to yourself in a relaxed, non-critical way. You can support the new learning and improvements that have taken place by resting or going for a relaxed walk. Please wear good shoes and avoid carrying a heavy bag. Check in with yourself occasionally to notice changes in the way you move, breathe, think, and feel. The benefits of a Feldenkrais exercise may be diminished if you go immediately into a stressful situation in which you are unable to pay attention to yourself.

You can do Awareness Through Movement as often as you like. Ideally, take a break of at least one hour between each lesson so your brain and body have time to absorb and integrate the new learning. If you do them consistently you will enjoy a process of steady improvement.

Where does the Feldenkrais Method come from?

The Feldenkrais Method was developed by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, an Israeli physicist, engineer, and martial artist who suffered from serious knee injuries. When his doctors advised him that surgery might not help him, he was inspired to search for an alternative solution to his physical problems. While doing so, he made some groundbreaking discoveries about how human learning and improvement takes place, and about how movement and posture are assembled - via experience - in the brain. Dr. Feldenkrais wrote seven books, developed hundreds of effective exercises and manual techniques, and trained three groups of students in his method.

Please Note: Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement audio or video lessons are not a substitute for medical treatment. If you have a medical condition, please consult your medical practitioner about using these programs. We cannot offer any warranty for the effectiveness of the lessons. Responsibility for the lessons is necessarily the user's.

About Feldenkrais Access

Whether you're a Feldenkrais novice, professional, or somewhere in between, Feldenkrais Access offers online programs for everybody! We also have numerous free resources, including a lesson library and article archive. Check us out at www.FeldenkraisAccess.com.

Questions

If you have any questions, we invite you to contact us at communications@FeldenkraisAccess.com.