



SENSEABILITY

A Newsletter of Applications of the FELDENKRAIS METHOD® of Somatic Education

Issue #9: Applications with Chronic Pain

We carry inside ourselves a personal pharmacy consisting of complex combinations of beliefs, symptoms, perceptions, hormones, neurotransmitters, social values, and intrinsic pain relievers like endorphins and enkephalins, that we can learn to use at our own discretion. A person can greatly contribute to his or her own healing process by how he or she uses two valuable healing tools: the mind and the body. (from Moving from Pain into Pleasure: Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain by Frank Wildman, Ph.D., C.F.T.)

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Learning Pleasure: Alleviating Chronic Pain with the FELDENKRAIS METHOD

The following is excerpted with permission from the forthcoming book: **Moving from Pain into Pleasure: Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain** by Frank Wildman, Ph.D., C.F.T.

Catherine came to me complaining of chronic pain and fatigue. Her physician had diagnosed her with Fibromyalgia, and prescribed a regimen of regular exercise. Although she tried, Catherine found the stretching difficult and painful. Walks left her completely exhausted. She began to be consumed by guilt at not being able to muster the willpower necessary to finish the exercises.

Then, another strategy was tried. Catherine's physician told her not to strain herself, to do only what was comfortable. But even so, Catherine found she could do very little. Her pain spread; she grew progressively weaker. Unable to perform even the most basic of activities, Catherine eventually lost her job. Besides experiencing paralyzing pain, she was confused and angry. Why was this happening to her? She

hadn't had any recent injuries. Only a year before, she had been a healthy, active woman. Now her life had come to a standstill.

Pain seizes us like a claw. It makes the ordinary act of life unbearable, fills us with dread, robs us of our interests, steals our vigor, sickens our ability to enjoy being alive. Pain seems like the ultimate insult to consciousness, depriving us of our ability to explore our senses and acquire new tastes. Pain shrinks us until we feel like a shell of our former selves, and despite all that we know about the chemistry, neurology and psychology of pain, its causes remain a mystery.

Through a series of FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION® lessons, Catherine began to learn the feeling of comfort, to move more efficiently, and even to regain organic satisfaction from simple day-to-day activities. She began to take walks again. She rediscovered how much she loved cooking and how to

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Personal and Professional Experience with Chronic Pain

Practitioner **Meena Narula** (<VNARULA56@aol.com>) has been working with persons experiencing chronic pain for over a decade. As a physical therapist she used various modalities to reduce the symptoms. She says, "These procedures appeared to provide temporary relief with very little lasting benefit. Though I was able to help some people, a vast majority had difficulty concentrating and many did not follow through with their home program."

Sometime in the 80s, Meena began to experience symptoms of pain, swelling and a decreased ability to function. She was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, and living with pain on a daily basis took on a new meaning. It also forced her to look beyond traditional ways of providing physical therapy to her clients. She graduated as a **FELDENKRAIS** practitioner in 1992. Since then she has worked with many individuals who have chronic pain and with many physicians who refer their clients to her facility. Besides teaching her clients about the causes of pain, Meena stresses the need for developing kinesthetic awareness.

Physical educators Kreighbaum and Barthels state: "To develop a frame of reference for kinesthetic sensations, an individual must experience a variety of positions and movements in many

environments. The perceptions associated with these situations are then stored in the brain for use as a reference... for future movements. Precise and accurate motor responses are developed from the integration of information from the cutaneous, joint, tendon, muscle and labyrinthine receptors."

AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT allows the individual to experience a wide variety of positions and movements in different operations. Gradually, as kinesthetic sense increases, the individual's performance skill for a particular task improves.

Meena often uses elements from the ATM lesson "Painting the Body" as an introduction to body awareness. The individuals are guided to begin painting non-painful areas of their body and then gradually paint around the painful areas.

Mark Reese (<RMIMoves@aol.com>) and **David Zemach-Bersin** (<dzbersin@aol.com>) developed a series of tapes/lessons called "Relaxercise" which have helped many people with chronic pain to discover for themselves the easiest way to turn, bend, straighten, sit, stand and walk. ATM lessons designed to address breathing are also helpful (see the lesson in this issue).

FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION lessons are

very gentle. Meena uses the concepts of support, "going with the pattern" and inducing shortening in shortening muscles; all appear to help people with chronic pain. She begins at a distance from the painful area, trying to be in tune with the client. When she detects a sense of discomfort in their posture, she has them change their position. Many who experience chronic pain report a sense of relief, a lightness, and a "difference."

Dr. John Chester, (<feldendoc@aol.com>) another **FELDENKRAIS** practitioner, suggests that "treatments which lead to increased patient understanding and an acceptance of personal responsibility for the further course of their life will facilitate participation in health promoting activities..."

Meena adds, "Understanding the nature of chronic pain and the rationale for using the **FELDENKRAIS METHOD** helps them become participants in their own healing."

Resources

The following audiotapes are available through the **FELDENKRAIS GUILD** of North America. 1-800-775-2118

Relaxercise by Mark Reese and David Zemach-Bersin. A boxed set of twelve 20-minute **ATM** lessons on 6 cassettes. Also available in book format.

Moving from Pain into Pleasure by Frank Wildman. A number of ATM lessons on a single 90-minute cassette.

Dealing with Back Pain by Frank Wildman. A number of ATM lessons on a single 90-minute cassette.

TMJ Tape by Frank Wildman. A number of ATM lessons for the head and jaw on a single cassette.

TMJ Health by Mark Reese and David Zemach-Bersin. Ten proven 25-minute ATM lessons in a six-tape set. Available only from **FELDENKRAIS® Resources** at (800) 765-1907

The FELDENKRAIS METHOD® of Somatic Education

The **FELDENKRAIS METHOD**® is an educational system that develops a functional awareness of the self in the environment.

AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT® is the group lesson form in which students explore movement sequences according to the verbal directions of the teacher.

FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION® is the private lesson form combining instructive touch and movement with verbal cues.

GUILD CERTIFIED PRACTITIONERS must complete 800 - 1000 hours of in-depth training over a three to four year period in a Professional Training Program regulated by the **FGNA**.

For more information, please contact your **GUILD**

CERTIFIED PRACTITIONER of the **FELDENKRAIS GUILD**® of North America at (800) 775-2118.

Please Note: The **FELDENKRAIS METHOD** is an educational system. It is not a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Consult your physician if you have pain or difficulty with movement.

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perform movements such as chopping, stirring, bending and lifting without experiencing pain. She was able to sleep more soundly and to find new relaxing positions in which to enjoy her favorite books. Eventually Catherine was able to return to work.

The **FELDENKRAIS METHOD** is instructive and suggestive, not corrective. Unlike western medicine, the Method goes beyond the focus on pain management. The movements can be performed alone as self-directed movement explorations (ATM lessons for example, my tape, *Moving from Pain into Pleasure*). The movements are not magical tricks, yet their

The Impossible Became Easy

"Oh, I can do this!" professional artist Theresa Ganley remembers an inner voice exclaiming as she experienced her first **AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT** lesson with **FELDENKRAIS** practitioner **Bob Hunter**. Moving her eyes in an easy pain-free way was a revelation and a delight.

During several years of double vision and constant pain that baffled medical authorities she had found no relief. Now she was discovering that, as she allowed her entire self to participate in the movement of her eyes, what she had thought impossible became easy. As a child she had been diagnosed with Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, a degenerative nervous system disorder similar to Multiple Sclerosis.

"Over the years I had experienced a loss of feeling and mobility in my limbs, and then I had a spinal fusion operation because of severe scoliosis. I see now that I had developed the habit of forcing my eyes to be always on full alert. They were one of the few tools I felt I had to keep my balance. In overworking my eyes I had strained them and lost control." Her creative work as well as the tasks of daily life became extremely difficult. Driving a car was inadvisable.

In the course of further **FELDENKRAIS** lessons with Bob, Theresa has recovered significant movement in all her actions and can engage in life more fully again. Her balance, her walking, her driving have all improved. She is happily painting and exhibiting. "My most recent work was a joy!"

"I work with more freedom now. I trust my intuition more. And I have no pain in my eyes, hands or anywhere!" Theresa has also found that her growing knowledge of the **FELDENKRAIS METHOD** as a learning process has informed and improved her work with Luke, her service dog, and with horses and riders as a volunteer assistant in the local Therapeutic Riding program.

"Initially I was seeking pain relief -- no small thing. But now I've come to understand the **FELDENKRAIS METHOD** more globally. It can be embraced in all aspects of living."



results can be so dramatic that they almost seem magical. What is instead required is a transformation on the part of the individual: learning to alter our attention, the expansion of our sensory perceptions, and the belief that we are entitled to feel pleasure as formidable as our pain.

Why We Hurt

Imagine the pleasure of picking up a ball in anticipation of tossing it back and forth with a friend. You toss it back and forth for a while in a casual way, without pressure or competition. You feel exhilarated and relaxed at the same time... After playing ball for a while you might give in to the pleasure of a good nap. Or just enjoy a state of deep relaxation throughout your body after having your heart beat quickly, your blood flow freely and your senses focused sharply.

Imagine, however, if you held onto that ball and didn't throw it. After several hours, the muscles would cramp. Not only might you hurt while you were holding the ball, but if you held on in spite of painful signals, you could be sore for days afterwards. We do such things every day — not with a ball but in other ways.

The Pain Trap

What if your body is filled with a feeling of malaise and discomfort, punctuated by moments of ache or even sharp, stabbing pain? Often these kinds of sensations can become associated with a crushing cycle of fear of moving or a fear of exploring, and finally, a fear of feeling one's own body altogether. As one of my students said, "What's the point of being aware of my body if it only makes me more aware of more pain? I'd like to never think about my body again."

Escaping the Pain Trap: Using the FELDENKRAIS METHOD

How do we develop a sense of internal pleasure? ... First we must rediscover our ability to experience pleasure.

The first step is to learn to move in ways so gentle, so easy, and so organically pleasurable that we will want to repeat them. Learn to identify sensations besides pain. The movements must be precise, relaxed and stimulating in a way that is completely different from other forms of exercise we may know. Every day, in increments of short duration, we must get a pleasure fix and change neuromuscular habits that stiffen and pin us down. As we perform these tender movements, our pleasure centre will awaken; we will want these movements without fear. We may find ourselves saying,

"I didn't know my hips and back could feel this good... What's odd is how I feel good all over... I still have some pain in my knee and ankle, but I feel so good that it seems to not be as important as before. I'm actually enjoying my body anyway."

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When I first worked with Catherine, she seemed at once stiff and yet filled with lassitude. When she turned her head, she had a good range of motion, but the movements would result in pain. I observed her movements. I had her lie on her back on the table and began to gently roll her head from side to side using so little effort that she laughed at her inability to detect how her head was even moving. She then learned to move her head by herself with the same minimal effort.

I began to do the same kind of supportive, gentle movements with her shoulders, arms, torso, and eventually legs and pelvis. At the end of the first session, Catherine could turn her head without effort or consequent pain. But more than that, she had learned how to roll her body from side to side on the table which required coordinating her head, trunk and limbs.

This simple act of rolling proved to be an important movement: Catherine was now able to get her own back massage simply by rolling on the floor. In our next session I taught her several different styles of rolling until she could roll onto her stomach and back with the grace of a dancer. In order to roll, Catherine learned that she had to open her shoulder joints, use her hips and move every joint in her body.

What is revealing about Catherine's experience is that there was no attempt at focusing on pain relief. Using the **FELDENKRAIS METHOD**, Catherine and I worked on the learning process involved in improving her ability to function. In essence, Catherine was learning how to move again. She not only regained control over the pains in her body, but she learned to experience organic pleasure from ordinary movements.

Like Catherine, there comes a time when we all need to learn our way through life's pains. The task of learning to experience pleasure might seem pleasurable in itself, but for some people, it's an imposing challenge. At last there is a method to guide us through the labyrinth of sensations. 

A Short ATM: Relaxing the Breath

by *Richard Frye*

Intense concentration often leads to shallow breathing and excessive tension. This simple toning lesson opens the breath, relaxes the body, and renews our ability to concentrate with more energy and focus, while bringing awareness to the relationships among body, breath, and vocalization.

1. Sit or stand comfortably, and observe the quality of your breathing...don't change it, just observe it...and notice the feelings and sensations in the rest of your body which go with this kind of breathing... Now, say the letter "**a**" (rhymes with "hay") out loud, in a tone a little lower than your speaking voice...and hold the tone easily just until an inhalation wants to happen ... don't push ... observe all the muscular preparations that happen for making sound, and begin the sound gradually from silence...repeat it several times...and then let it go and breathe normally.
2. Now say "a" as an open '**a**' as in the word "far"... and hold the tone gently ... you use your throat differently for this tone ... repeat it a few times... ...and then let it evolve into an '**i**' (rhymes with "eye")... as in *aaahhhhhiiiiiii*...and repeat that cycle a few times ... you breathe out with the sound, and the inbreath happens by itself... the inhalations will start getting bigger by themselves ... and then add '**e**' to it ... so the 'ah' becomes 'eye,' and then becomes 'e'...something like *aaahhhhhiiiiiiiiiyyeeyyyyyyy* ... notice how your tongue, teeth, palate, throat, chest, and back are involved... and rest... observe how your breath, body, and attitude are changing.
3. Continue, and several times add a "**u**" (sounds like "yew")...so it becomes *aaahhhhhhhiiiiiiiiiieeyyyyyyyuuuuuuuu*....feel how your lips are involved...
...and then add "**o**" (sounds like "oh") to morph it into *aaahhhhhhyyyyyyyeeyyyyyyyuuuuuuuooooo*... and repeat it a number of times...and finally, close your lips to change the final tone to "**om**"... do the whole sequence several times... and then let it go and rest. Let your breath happen by itself. You will feel calmer, more relaxed, and more alert. 