

The Ultimate *Feldenkrais* Guide to Relieve Neck and Shoulder Pain

Experience the Immediate Benefits of doing *Awareness Through Movement*®



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Feldenkrais
Practitioner^{cm}*

The *Feldenkrais* Store

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What is *Awareness Through Movement*?

Feldenkrais exercises are what we call *Awareness Through Movement* lessons. These lessons use the principles of developmental learning - the same kind of learning that naturally allows a child to crawl, walk, and interact with the world. While development is rather haphazard, *Feldenkrais* lessons use these ideas in specific sequences combined with awareness to improve our movements, abilities, and well-being.

The *Feldenkrais Method*® was developed by [Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais](#), an Israeli scientist and martial artist. There are two approaches to the *Feldenkrais Method*. One is *Functional Integration*®, which is the hands-on approach to the work. The other is *Awareness Through Movement*, which is the verbally guided aspect of the method. While the same principles apply to both, we will be doing *Awareness Through Movement* in this ebook.

Getting the Most from *Feldenkrais* Lessons

Several essential principles will help you get the most from doing *Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement* lessons.

But, let's not just talk about them. Let's put these principles into action so you can actually feel and see the differences they make in your ability to learn and improve.

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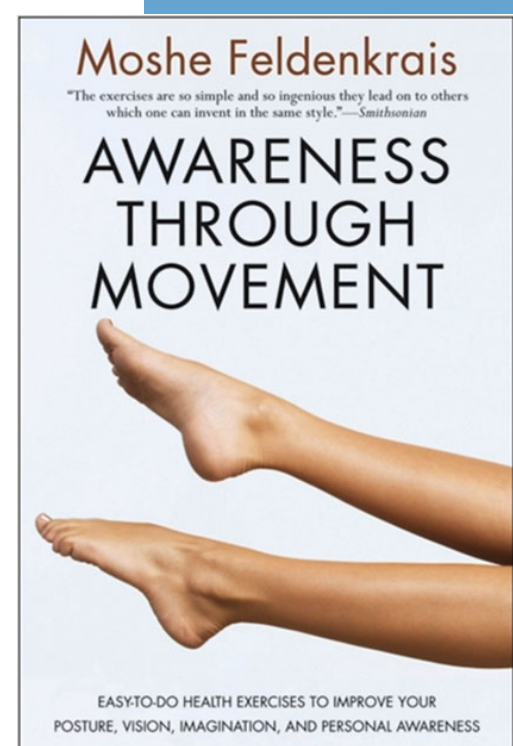


This lesson will improve your ability to turn by differentiating the movements of the eyes from the head and neck. Thereby creating a greater range of motion through the entire chest and spine while reducing tension in the neck and shoulders.

Let's do a Lesson

To begin with, we will do a short lesson. This one is based on a lesson that Dr. Feldenkrais presents in his [Awareness Through Movement](#) book, Lesson 10 - "Movement of the Eyes Organizes the Movement of the Body." This is a very simplified version of this lesson adapted to sitting in a chair.

In essence, the lesson will improve your ability to turn by differentiating the movements of the eyes from the head and neck, thereby creating a greater range of motion through the entire chest and spine while reducing tension in the neck and shoulders.



Create a Space for Your Lesson

To begin with, sit on a firm chair. Most lessons are done on the floor on a blanket. But this lesson will be done in a chair. A dining chair is perfect. If you don't have one, find the firmest chair you have. If you are using an office chair, make sure it doesn't roll or turn when you do the lesson. We want the movement to be in you, not the chair. Position the chair so you are facing a wall.

Some Key Ideas to Keep in Mind Before You Begin

Move Within Your Range of Comfort

When you make a movement, refrain from going to the maximum. If you feel a stretch or a strain, you have gone too far. So make the movement smaller and slower.

When you do these movements, you want to move within your range of comfort. Why? Because these lessons will increase the range of motion in which you *are* comfortable. In other words, by exploring variations in your movement, sensing, and awareness within your range of comfort, your range of motion will automatically expand.

Smaller, Slower Movements Allow You to Sense More

Large effortful movements consume your sensation and your attention. There is a direct relationship between how much effort you put into something and how much you

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•

*Your Breath
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can sense. For example, if you are carrying a sack of potatoes and a butterfly lands on it, you cannot feel the butterfly. But if you hold a feather between your thumb and index finger and that same butterfly lands on it, you can feel it.

This is the kind of sensitivity we want to cultivate when doing *Awareness Through Movement*.

💡 The Nervous System Thrives on Differences

We want to make as many distinctions as possible when we do these lessons. This is something we need to learn to do. Often when people start doing *Feldenkrais* lessons they only have a few ways to evaluate themselves: hurts/doesn't hurt, tight/loose, or tense/relaxed. We want to leave these evaluations behind and notice differences in the domains of quality of movement, the range of motion, and sensing skeletal parts.

💡 Your Breath Creates Ease in Movement

As you do a movement, pay attention to your breath. How are you breathing? Make sure your breath is easy and comfortable. Sometimes in a lesson your breath is coordinated with a movement. Other times it is separate from a movement.

We will often hold the breath or breathe shallowly when we encounter something unfamiliar or that we expect to be difficult. When you sense the breath and keep it easy, you will create more ease in the task at hand.

*I believe that the
unity of mind and
body is an
objective reality.
They are not just
parts somehow
related to each
other, but an
inseparable whole
while functioning.
A brain without a
body could not
think.*

— Moshe
Feldenkrais

Begin With a Scan

Most *Feldenkrais* lessons begin with a scan. Scanning is when you move your attention to sense different parts of yourself. A scan has a couple of essential functions. One, it turns your attention inward to your sensations in preparation for the experience. And two, it gives you a baseline to which can compare back as you progress through the lesson.

Sit toward the front edge of the chair. Remove your shoes. Place both feet on the floor under your knees which are open a little wider than hip-width apart.

As you sit, close your eyes and begin sensing your feet on the floor. Notice how each foot contacts the floor a little differently. There may be more weight on the heel, the outside of the foot, or the front of the foot of each foot. Bring your attention to the pelvis as you sit. Can you feel more weight on one sit bone than the other? Move your awareness to your shoulders. Is one more forward than the other? And finally, attend to the spine between the pelvis and the head. Are some parts of it more easily felt than others?

A scan prepares your mind, brain, and nervous system for the lesson and establishes a baseline which you can compare back to as you progress through the lesson.

In a class setting, most scans and lessons are done lying on the floor. And sometimes sitting or standing.



1. Turning to the left

Bring your right arm out in front of you at shoulder height. Have the elbow bent a little, so the hand is 10-12 inches in front of your face. Look at the hand. Now turn your arm, head, and eyes to the left and then return to the front. Do this several times.

2. Establish a Reference

Measuring Your Progress

In *Feldenkrais* lessons, we use a reference movement. It's a movement we do that allows us to measure our progress through a lesson. Sometimes there is one, sometimes there are many reference movements. Sometimes they are explicit, sometimes they are implicit. The ones we are using in this lesson are explicit.

Do a few movements like this and turn to the left and stop. Look over your right hand and mark a spot on the wall with your attention as a reference point by which you can measure your progress.

Let all that go. Bring your arm, head, and eyes back to the front and rest. When you turned to the left, what did you do with your left hand? Was it hanging by your side? Or resting on your lap?

In Feldenkrais lessons, we use a reference movement. It's a movement we do that allows us to measure our progress through a lesson.

3. Separating the Movement of Your Head and Shoulders

Now bring the right arm up, look at your hand, turn to the left and remain in that set position. From this position, turn your head and eyes further to the left and then back to the hand.

Do this gently and slowly. If you feel any strain at all, make the movement smaller. Find a way to do it comfortably. Do it as many times as is comfortable and then rest. If you start to feel fatigued at all, stop and rest. When you rest, bring everything back to the front, and bring your arm down.

The Importance of Resting

We rest for several reasons.

One is to punctuate the movement. If we don't, it starts to become like a long run-on sentence and loses its meaning.

But, if we stop, take a rest, even briefly, the movement becomes much more meaningful to your nervous system.

Another reason is fatigue can develop in the nervous system. This may be felt as tiredness in the muscles or a lack of focus. Resting helps to revitalize the nervous system.

Ideally, take a rest before you get tired.

If your mind wonders, if you get tired, or if you experience discomfort, stop and rest. Then come back to the movement. It will be more comfortable, and your attention will be refreshed.

Resting is very important.

Rests give our brain and nervous system a chance to refresh.

•

If you get tired, stop and rest.

If your mind wonders or you lose track, stop and rest.

If something hurts, stop and rest.

•

Ideally, stop and rest before you need to.

4. Check your progress

Bring your right arm up again, look at your hand, and turn to the left as far as you can comfortably. Look over your hand to the wall and notice how much further you turned this time compared to the beginning. Rest again.

This was just one straightforward variation and brief rest. You have already made improvements!

5. Separating the Movement of the Eyes from the Head

Let's continue. Bring your right arm in front of you again, look at the hand and turn to the left. Go as far to the left within your range of comfort and remain there.

Now keep your head oriented toward your hand and just look with the eyes to the left and back to the hand. Don't move your head. When the eyes go to the left, take them into the left corners of eye sockets. Of course, be gentle. Don't strain the eyes. Do this as many times as is comfortable and then rest.

Bring the eyes back to the hand, return to the front, and rest. As you rest, notice what sensation you are having.

Sometimes our physical parts get stuck together resulting in limited movement, pain, or injury.

Feldenkrais lessons help to “differentiate” these parts one from another.

So when they are brought back together, “integrated”, the whole movement is smoother, easier, and more comfort.



6. Separating the Movement of the Head and the Eyes

Bring your arm up again, look at the hand, and turn to the left. Once again, go as far as you can within your range of comfort and remain there. Now, leave the eyes resting on the hand and turn just the head further to the left and back to the hand.

This can be tricky. So go slowly. Make sure you are breathing. Now, as the head turns to the left, the eyes remain on the hand, and the eyes move into the right corners of the eye sockets.

Do this movement as many times as is comfortable. Then bring the head, eyes, and hand back to each other and return to the front. Take a nice rest.

As you rest, sense your breath, your pelvis and your feet on the floor.

7. Check Your Progress

Once again, bring the right arm out in front, rest the eyes on the hand, and turn to the left as far as you can comfortably and stop there. Look over your hand to the wall and notice how much further you have turned now.

Do a few more movements for your enjoyment. Bring your awareness to your breath and coordinate it as you turn. Feel the movement through your chest, ribs, and spine. Do this as many times as you like and then rest.

*Check your
breath! We will
often hold the
breath or breathe
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💡 What is Important About Working in this Way?

By engaging the wisdom of your nervous system and tapping into your brain's innate ability to learn, you have increased your ability to turn to the left easily and comfortably.

So why is this important? What does it matter that you can do that now? Why is it better than efforting, stretching and straining?

For one thing, big effortful movements engage more muscular effort than is necessary to do the action. The extra muscular effort just gets in the way of a smooth and even, powerful movement. By making smaller moves, you learn to engage only the muscular work you need to do the action you want. This means your movements become more efficient, congruent, and can be more powerful.

Often, we may feel like we have to put more effort into a movement or to stretch because it seems like we are met with resistance. That resistance is just the preoccupation of your brain and nervous system with “other” movements that are not compatible with the ones you are trying to do. It's like unconsciously you are trying to enact more than one intention. Dr. Feldenkrais called this “cross-motivation.”

In these lessons, you learn to separate your motivations. So you can enact each one separately from the others. Do we know what these motivations are? Not necessarily. But we can sense them through our muscular effort. We can begin to sort these unconscious intentions in the process of a lesson.

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8. Compare Your Sides

Sit with your hands on your lap and just turn to the left and then turn to the right. Notice which way is more accessible to go? How do the two sides feel different from one another? Which way do you turn further?

Stand up from your chair. Feel your feet on the floor. Sense the differences between your sides.

Now turn to the left and turn to the right and feel the difference as you stand.

Walk around for a couple of minutes, look at things, notice what is different in your perception. After you take a few minutes to do this, return to your chair.

The Mind, the Brain and the Nervous System

As you have probably gathered by now, *Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement* lessons work with the interplay of your mind, brain, and nervous system. We can use our thoughts, awareness, and intention to change neurological patterning, and hence, our movement habits.

Let's take this idea a little further and do some work turning to the right.

—
Remember, your nervous system thrives on differences.

Taking the time to notice differences as you progress through the lesson helps to deepen and integrate the learning.
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9. Turning to the Right

Using Your Imagination to Change Your Brain (and Your Movement)

9a. Set Your Reference Movement

Sitting in your chair. Bring your left arm in front of you at shoulder height and rest your eyes on your hand. Make one turn to the right, notice how far you turn by making a reference point on the wall and then return to the front and rest.

9b. Imagining Movements to the Right

Bring the left arm up again and with the eyes directed to the hand, close the eyes and imagine you are turning to the right. That's right, just imagine it in whatever way makes sense to you.

Coordinating the movement with your breath, imagine you are turning easily and comfortably. Imagine doing this several times and then rest.

Did your breathing change when you stopped to rest?

Sometimes, even when imagining, we might hold our breath indicating we are efforting in our imagination.

9c. Separating Movements of the Head and Shoulders

Once again, bring your arm up, direct your eyes to your hand and close them. Imagine turning as far to the right as you can comfortably. From this imagined place, turn your head and eyes further to the right and back. Coordinate each movement with your breath. Go gently and slowly.

You can use your imagination to prime your brain and your nervous system to accelerate learning.

Dr. Feldenkrais often said,

“If you know what you are doing, you can do what you want.”

Meaning, if you are aware of your movements, sensations, thoughts, and feels, you can have choice about them.

It's your imagination. You can imagine doing this movement with tremendous ease, smoothness, lightness. Imagine the movement as something that is satisfying or comforting.

Stop and rest.

9d. Separating Movements of the Eyes from the Head

Bring your left arm in front as before. Imagine turning even further to the right and this time, from this imagined position, leave your head oriented toward your hand and just think the movement of the eyes further to the right. Can you image seeing around behind yourself? In thought, your eyes move into the right corners of the eye sockets.

Rest again.

9e. Separating Movements of the Head from the Eyes

Now bring the arm in front again. Imagine turning even further to the right this time and staying there. And from this imagined position, leave the eyes resting on the hand and think the movement of turning your head further to the right. And now in thought, the eyes move into the left corners of the eye sockets.

Bring everything forward again and rest.

9f. Actualizing Movements to the Right

Again, bring the left arm in front and rest the eyes on the hand. Actualize the movement this time. Turn everything to the right. The head, the eyes and the arm all go to the right. Go as far as is comfortable and see how far you have gone now. How far do you go? Most likely much further than when we started this side. Perhaps even a greater distance than you went on the other side.

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How is this possible? How can just thinking a series of movements create such a remarkable change in such a short period?

💡 Imagined Movement and Actual Movement Ignite the Same Neuro-Pathways

It is the interplay of the mind and the brain. By using our imagination, we can activate the same neuro-pathways as by actually doing it. Dr. Feldenkrais understood this decades ago, long before there were fMRIs that allowed neurologists to confirm that doing a movement and thinking about a movement activated the same neurology.

10. Return to the Scan

Sit comfortably again. With your feet on the floor and your hands resting on your thighs. Sense yourself now. Remember the scan we did in the beginning? Sense your feet on the floor. Has the pattern of contact changed? Bring your awareness to your pelvis and your sit bones. What has changed here? Attend to your shoulders. Is the same one forward or has the way your shoulders rest changed? Move your sensing to your spine. Is it easier to sense? Are the areas that were absent in your attention more available now?

Now, just turn left and right and notice the ease to both sides.

Stand and turn left and right. Walk around for a few minutes and notice what has changed in your perception.

*...self-knowledge
through
awareness is the
goal of
reeducation. As we
become aware of
what we are doing
in fact, and not
what we say or
think we are
doing, the way to
improvement is
wide open to us.*

— Moshe
Feldenkrais

In Conclusion

So there you go. This is a straightforward lesson which hopefully has had a profound impact on your personal experience.

There are literally thousands of *Feldenkrais* lessons to explore. Each experience works to improve a different aspect of our functioning so we can lead fuller, more satisfying lives.

What have you learned about doing *Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement* lessons?

- *Feldenkrais* lessons almost always use a scan in preparation for the lesson
- Reference movements help us to consciously and unconsciously measure our progress
- Working within your range of comfort will expand your range of comfort
- Using less effort helps us to sense more of what we are actually doing
- Your breath reveals how much effort you are using and can help you create ease
- *Feldenkrais* lessons are an interplay between the mind, brain and nervous system
- Imagined and actual movements ignite the same neurology
- You can accelerate your learning by using your imagination
- You can use your mind to change your brain

*There are literally
thousands of
Feldenkrais
Lessons to explore
and learn from.*

*In his lessons, Dr.
Feldenkrais
touched on nearly
every aspect of
human
functioning.*

As You Continue Your Exploration

Keep these ideas in mind as you continue your exploration into *Feldenkrais* lessons. Attend a class, get private lessons and study at home. My online shop, [The Feldenkrais Store](https://www.achievingexcellence.com), at [AchievingExcellence.com](https://www.achievingexcellence.com), is a treasure trove of *Feldenkrais*, books, audio, and video that you can purchase. In addition to that, I have a large selection of articles on a wide range of topics about the *Feldenkrais Method*.

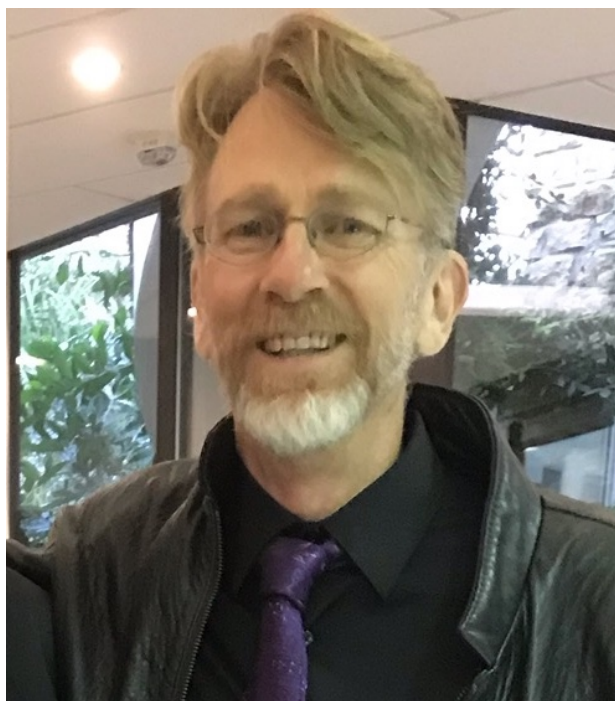
If you have any questions, please reach out to me:

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*What I'm after
isn't flexible
bodies, but flexible
brains. What I'm
after is to restore
each person to
their human
dignity.*

– Moshe
Feldenkrais





About the Author, Al Wadleigh, GCFP

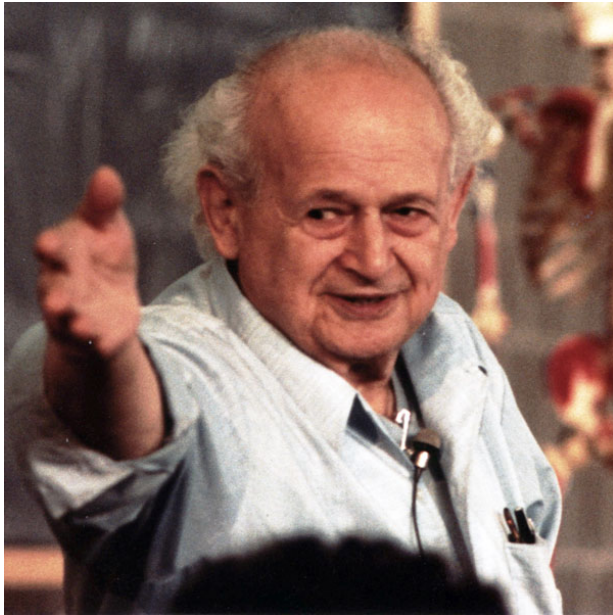
[Al Wadleigh](#) is a *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner^{cm}*, practicing in Madrid and Cerrillos, New Mexico. Al works with clients one-on-one, teaches *Awareness Through Movement®* classes, and presents in and sponsors *Feldenkrais* workshops. His background includes extensive training in Ericksonian Psychotherapy and NLP, seminar and workshop design and promotion, and a degree in Psychology.

He created and designed the website, [The Feldenkrais Store](#) to be the best source for media and information pertaining to the *Feldenkrais Method®*. Just as each private session with Al is composed of guided movements that are unique to each client, Al also designs classes and workshops to achieve group outcomes for increasing flexibility, strength, and ease of movement.

“Al is amazingly good at guiding you into states of ease, clarity, comfort, and freedom of movement that may have been constrained by years of habitual patterns. His methods are therapeutic and effective. You can feel the difference and it feels good.” – Dave DiRito, M.A.

“Al personifies many qualities of a master teacher: patience, competence, empathy and strong communication skills. These skills can be experienced in each class that he teaches. In my thirty plus years as an educator, I never taught or mentored a teacher as dedicated or effective as Al. Al’s level of mastery translates to a happy, healthy, active, life-long learner of seventy-seven years that attempts to attend a class taught by Al every week. Thank you, Al for the joy that you bring to my life.

– Jean Rice, Retired Teacher



About Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984)

The *Feldenkrais Method*® was originated by [Moshe Feldenkrais, D.Sc.](#), a pioneer in movement science and the innovator of therapeutic and educational approaches. Feldenkrais was born in Russia in 1904 and immigrated to Palestine at the age of 14. He undertook this journey without his family as a member of a caravan from his village. As a young man, he was an excellent athlete and

through the influence of a British officer, learned Ju-Jitsu. He was both a very physical young man and an excellent student with a creative mind. Even at a young age he was interested in the inner development of the human being. He was influenced by Coue's work in autosuggestion and early writings on both the unconscious mind and the self-image.

Feldenkrais earned his doctorate in physics at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he assisted Nobel Prize Laureate Frederic Joliot-Curie at the Curie Institute. During his university years, he met Kano, the originator of Judo. He became one of the first Europeans to receive a black belt in Judo and was the founder of the French Judo Association. Feldenkrais studied Judo intensively and became a well-known Judo teacher.

During World War II, Feldenkrais went to England where he worked in antisubmarine research, trained paratroopers in self-defense techniques and authored books on Judo. He aggravated an old soccer injury to his knees and began many years of extended work on himself. His own recovery process and subsequent wide-ranging research resulted in the creation of the unique educational system — the *Feldenkrais Method* and its components *Awareness Through Movement* and *Functional Integration* — which incorporated his background in physics and Judo along with a lifelong interest in human development. Upon moving to Israel, he gave up his work as an engineer and researcher and proceeded to use his genius to directly help people live more fulfilling lives. Feldenkrais was fluent in six languages and authored six books on his method. Feldenkrais died in 1984, leaving a small group of highly-trained practitioners who have continued to teach his method worldwide.

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