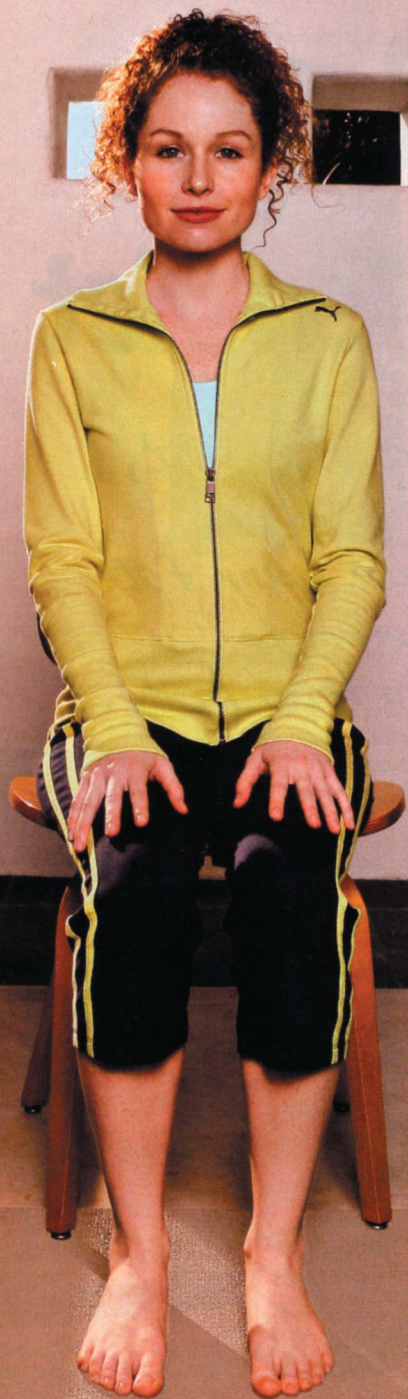


physical (re)education

The Feldenkrais Method helps prevent aches and pains by changing the way you move.



Feldenkrais can help you sit with less strain.

TO EASE SORE MUSCLES, you can turn to massage, hydrotherapy, and many other natural remedies. To prevent the tension and strain behind your discomfort, try the Feldenkrais Method, an educational system developed a half-century ago by physicist, engineer, and judo black belt Moshe Feldenkrais to promote more efficient movement with less pain, enhance flexibility and stability, and improve wellbeing.

"Everyone's musculoskeletal system has an optimal way of moving," says Jeff Haller, a Feldenkrais teacher in Bend, Ore. "When you're not moving in the most efficient way, you're putting stress on your body."

The Feldenkrais Method helps you sidestep that stress by redefining how you carry out everyday actions like walking, sitting, standing up, and bending. "By the end of a lesson, you might be able to do things that you couldn't do an hour before," says Sheri Cohen, a guild-certified Feldenkrais teacher in Seattle. (Instructors certified by the Feldenkrais Guild of North America have at least 800 hours of training.)

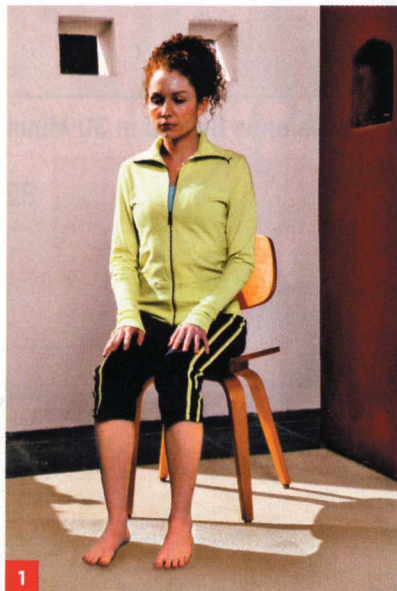
"People with cancer sometimes use Feldenkrais to stay mobile or flexible," says Wolf E. Mehling, M.D., assistant clinical professor at the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. "But it can help anybody—not just those with health problems—increase body awareness."

There are two approaches to learning the Feldenkrais Method. During "awareness through movement" classes, you're verbally guided through simple sequences and encouraged to pay attention to habitual motions. "We may begin by having you lie on the floor and come up to standing, for example," says Haller. "We ask you to notice how you're lying, how you're being supported by the floor, where your shoulders are placed. Then, after you stand, we ask, 'How did you make that movement?'" The standing action may be repeated over

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By ELIZABETH BARKER
Photography by DORIT THIES

healing therapies



A MINI LESSON

Try the method for yourself with this do-at-home exercise from Seattle-based Feldenkrais teacher Sheri Cohen.

1. Sit near the edge of a chair, both feet on the floor, one hand on each thigh. Notice your breathing.



2. Slowly turn to the left several times. Notice how far you can comfortably turn without moving so far that you feel stretching or pulling. Which parts of your body participate in this movement? Pause and rest comfortably, then return to starting position.



3. Bring your elbows and wrists together, and cup your hands around your face. Turn to the left without allowing your arms to slide against each other. Move slowly, without pushing. Can you allow the movement to become easier each time? Bring your arms down and rest. Do you notice any change in your breathing? ▶▶

healing therapies



4. Turn to the left and stay there. Move only your eyes several times to the left, watching the room as you go. Untwist yourself and rest.



5. Slide your right knee forward several times. What else moves when you move your knee? Now repeat movement #2. How has it changed? Does the movement feel easier than the first time? Can you move farther with less effort? Is more of your body participating in the movement? If you wish, repeat the sequence on your right side and compare it with the left. What makes this side different?

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and over, refined each time with suggestions for slight variations. In this way, you learn to integrate healthier movement patterns.

Instructors also offer a one-on-one technique called “functional integration,” where they use touch and guidance according to individual need.

In either case, teachers don’t use themselves as examples. “The important work is done by you, paying attention to your own body and learning,” says Haller. “It helps people discover capabilities they never knew they had.”

Such discoveries can yield rewards that go beyond the physical. “When you learn to move in a different way, without inhibitions or limitations, you create a more positive self-image,” Cohen says. “And that can initiate a transformation.” 🌱