

HEALTHY BACK - FORM, FUNCTION & FLOW

An Introduction to the Alexander Technique – An Affordable & Effective Back Pain Solution

There are approximately 31 million people with lower back pain at any given time in the United States. Over \$85 billion dollars are spent on treating back pain each year. Four out of five people will experience some type of back problem in their lifetime. Studies indicate that although more money than ever is being spent, there has not been any decrease in incidence of pain. In fact, there was a 65% increase in back pain between the years 1997-2005.¹ What can you do take care of your back and maintain your form, function and flow amidst this painful trend? The Alexander Technique is a proven affordable, efficient and effective resource that teaches self-management skills to support and maintain healthy back *form, function and flow*.²

What is meant by **Form, Function and Flow**®? Typically, the more people use themselves in compressed patterns the more compressed they become. With the Alexander Technique you learn new skills to release compressive patterns in motion and in static positions. In other words, you learn to notice your **Form**. This allows better use of the whole self in relation to the various job related tasks performed throughout the day and thus improves **Function** with sitting, standing, reaching, lifting, etc. When *form* and *function* work together there can be a more natural **Flow** eliminating old patterns of compression, increasing joint flexibility, restoring natural coordination, easier breathing, balance and poise. This concept of Form, Function and Flow captures the multiplicity of benefits from the Alexander Technique in a simple phrase.

Has anyone ever told you to sit up straight? Try it now and notice where you happen to be holding tension. Explore mobility through your spine and ribs when sitting up straight. Traditionally, in attempting to “sit up straight” most people over tighten muscles by pulling their shoulders back, tucking their tummy in and holding their breath. This usually causes a forced fixed state that is hard to maintain and not comfortable. Spines are designed to compress and decompress. They are not straight. They have four curves. Yet, due to work stimuli many people are constantly compressed hunched over in one big curve or compensating in an overly straightened state. Neither are optimal form, function and flow. Both create shallow breathing, headaches, carpal tunnel, back and neck pain.

Despite the proliferation of ergonomic keyboards, desktops and chairs; patterns of repetitive stress injuries, back pain and repeated headaches persist. There is a vicious circle with back pain and repetitive stress injuries. First compression occurs, and then you notice pain. Typically frustration, irritation, fear and even depression follow which pull you down further, causing more pain over longer periods. This is commonly called the pain loop cycle. This cycle gets chronically worse unless you are trained with new skills to get out of the pain loop cycle pattern. This is exactly what makes the Alexander Technique a valuable resource. It offers a new awareness of portable, practical principles to release you from the pain loop cycle process. “Lessons in the Alexander Technique offer an individualized approach designed to help people recognize, understand and avoid poor habits affecting postural tone and neuromuscular coordination.”³

In today’s business environment enhanced productivity is necessary to improve the bottom line. Eighty-three million days of work are lost per year due to back pain according to the Georgetown’s Center on an Aging Society.⁴ Poor form, function and flow lead to decreased profitability. An increasing amount of money is spent by businesses to make up for missed work days and reduced efficiency. Consider the cost of workers’ compensation cases. Missed days of work and high health care costs can be mitigated with improved *form, function and flow* in the workplace.



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(Continued from p.1) In a long term chronic back pain study presented in the British Medical Journal, there was an 86% reduction of days in pain for individuals taking Alexander Lessons compared with a control group.⁵ A second part study demonstrated that lessons in the Alexander Technique were the most cost effective and efficient means of treating back pain sufferers with long term results.⁶

According to Dr. Gunnar Anderson, former chairman of the department of Orthopedics at Rush Hospital in Chicago, and chief back surgery study investigator "More than 650,000 surgical procedures are performed annually for back pain in the United States with costs exceeding \$20 billion."⁷ One back surgery has the potential of costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in total medical expenditures. With lessons in the Alexander Technique you learn to prevent injuries and movement quality is improved. You regain and maintain wider range of motion. Most importantly you eliminate the **root cause** of repetitive stress injuries.

People who have taken Alexander Technique lessons report that it is an invaluable tool that increases their form, function and flow throughout the day. They use the practical principles for adaptability to the workplace shuffle. As soon as they notice tension in their body, they recognize and release it, allowing them to function better in their work environments. Freedom, fluidity, flexibility and more responsiveness to change are some of the many benefits that result from taking lessons.

With just six lessons and a regular exercise routine, the Alexander Technique brought those suffering from chronic back pain an average of 23 days of pain a month down to only 3 days over a long term study.⁸ Twenty less days of pain per month equals twenty more productive days of work. With the staggering costs of health care can you and your business afford not to take care of proper **Form, Function and Flow**®?



Christie Johnson, an Internationally Certified Alexander Technique Teacher, helps people discover their unique patterns of thinking and moving in relation to what they do. She helps executives and performers mitigate stage fright, seniors and surfers improve balance, gardeners and golfers improve range of motion, pregnant women and their partners expand their comfort, and riders and runners to release muscle tension. Free Your Flow... Workplace Workshops/Lessons, 951-312-2188

www.FormFunctionFlow.com



¹ Steenhuisen, J. U.S. Pain Costs Rise, But Pain Still There. Reuters, Retrieved Feb.12, 2008, from <http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSN1252822420080213>

² Little P, Lewith G, Webley F, et al. Randomised controlled trial of Alexander technique lessons, exercise, and massage (ATEAM) for chronic and recurrent back pain [Electronic Version], BMJ 2008;337:a884, http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/337/aug19_2/a884

³ Little et al, p.1

⁴ Chronic Back Pain- A leading cause of work limitations, Georgetown's Center on an Aging Society. (PDF) No. 8, March 2003, <http://ihcrp.georgetown.edu/agingsociety/pubhtml/backpain/backpain.htm>, p.1-6

⁵ Little et al, p.4

⁶ Hollinghurst S, Sharp D, Ballard K, et al. Randomised controlled trial of Alexander technique lessons, exercise, and massage (ATEAM) for chronic and recurrent back pain: economic evaluation. BMJ. 2008 Dec 11;337. PMID: 19074232

⁷ Tuzik, R. Study Investigates cost effectiveness of Spinal Surgery. EmaxHealth, Retrieved Jan. 12, 2009 <http://www.emaxhealth.com/2/45/28419/study-investigates-cost-effectiveness-spinal-surgery.html>

⁸ Little et al, p.7