



TOM MOVES

EVOLVE YOUR MOVEMENT

HOW TO PRACTICE MOVEMENT

(In a way that makes your life better!)

Learning, Movement and Your Brain

Us humans are the only animals that need to learn how to move. When Zebra's are born, they are up and running around within about 15 mins. Now that's crazy!

Human babies on the other hand, start taking their first steps at around 9-12 months. There is something inherent in our nervous system that means we aren't born with all of our movement patterns available from the get-go. We have to learn and develop them. It takes time.

The upside of this though is that it means we have a far greater potential for movement than other animals do. A Zebra doesn't have the luxury of being able to dance the cha cha, learn hula hooping or tightrope walking. It is basically stuck with it's reflex movements which it had right from the moment it was born.

We are the lucky ones. Our potential for movement is **ENORMOUS!**

Yet most of us never even explore this potential. In our culture, there is this idea that once you reach a certain level of proficiency, then you can stop learning. There's no need to go beyond the bare minimum that it takes to survive.

It's just like my school report cards always said... "So much wasted potential" (Little did they know I was focussing on potentials other than the ones they had in mind for me. Heh heh heh)

As a result of this conditioning, we tend to stop growing and instead get fixed into strong habitual patterns. These are patterns in our moving, thinking, sensing and feeling. These 4 are all interlinked.

Now this is where *The Feldenkrais Method*® comes in. [The feldenkrais method](#) is all about developing our potential as human beings. It's a way of improving our ability to learn, grow and change. It helps us to find our habits/patterns and find new and more efficient/enjoyable ones.

If you're reading this document, it probably means you're about to try (or already have tried) out some *Awareness Through Movement*® (ATM for short) lessons. These may be either from my online recordings, or perhaps in a class or workshop setting.

ATM lessons are one of the most powerful tools for changing your habits. These incredible lessons have been developed as a way to present challenges or puzzles to your nervous system. They literally re-write the patterns of movement in your brain. They also change your thinking, sensing and feeling.

The reason I wrote this document is to give you some guidelines about HOW to practice the lessons. This is important because understanding it makes the difference between true learning/growth and just repeating your old habits. Please, read on to discover how to make the practice worthwhile.

What to lie on

Many lessons are taught lying down on the floor. A thin foam mat (15mm-20mm is a good thickness) or even a carpeted area can provide enough padding to keep you comfortable. Yoga mats are usually a bit too thin. Bed mattresses are too thick because they don't give you good feedback from the floor.

How to dress

Lying on the floor doing small gentle movements means that your body temperature can drop quite quickly. It's a good idea to wear warm clothes so you don't have to get up and change mid-way through a lesson.

Also make sure the clothes you're wearing don't interfere with your movements. Super tight pants are a no-go.

Look after your comfort

Comfort is crucial when it comes to learning. If you're...

- Cold
- Tired
- Hungry
- In need of a pee
- Lying on something too hard
- Or finding the position you're in uncomfortable for some reason.

...then it's important to change the situation. Put on more layers, take a nap, adjust your position or pad yourself somehow. Do whatever you need to make sure you're feeling comfort in your situation.

Rest whenever you need

Resting gives a chance for your brain to integrate the things you've been paying attention to. You'll likely find that after a rest (even if it's short), your movement will have improved in quality.

If you start to feel physically or mentally tired also take a break. If you're losing interest in what you're doing, it's also a sign you may be tired.

Move slowly and effortlessly

Feedback is a requirement for learning anything. If you can't feel whether what you're doing is helping or hindering then there's no way to know how to adjust or change your approach. It's like walking around with a blindfold on and hoping not to crash into things.

A good way to increase the quality of your sensory feedback is to reduce your effort. This reduction in force allows you to become more sensitive. You can literally feel more of what's happening by not pushing so hard.

Moving slowly gives you time to feel things. If your movement is over in half a second flat then there's not much time to feel. If you take your time, you'll notice MUCH more.

Become curious about the process not intent on the goal

Your most important tool when it comes to learning is play. It's how children learn and the reason they are so good at it. Children are curious about their world and constantly experimenting. They should become our greatest mentors when it comes to learning.

Many of us adults on the other hand are so focussed on goals and outcomes that we get way too serious. This strangles our ability to learn.

One of the hallmarks of a good learner (ie: someone who knows how to play) is that they can focus their attention on the process, not the outcome. They're generally more interested in HOW they do the things they do as opposed to what they're trying to achieve.

In your movements, aim to increase your curiosity about your process. Ask yourself questions about HOW you do things. If you're too focussed on getting to the outcome, you'll miss the whole point of the exploration.

Quality over quantity

It's far better to do a few movements with full attention than it is to bang out reps.

If you've gone into the realm of mindlessly and mechanically repeating movements, it's a sign that your curiosity is not engaged. If this is the case, it means nothing will change. Autopilot cannot do anything other than what you already know.

One or two movements with the highest quality attention can have enormous impacts on the state of your nervous system and your movement. Truly, less is more!

Notice your breathing

Your task is to become a movement detective. To find the places where you're using unnecessary effort. Your first indicator of this will always be your breath. When you're struggling, pushing or forcing, your breath will change. You may hold it fully or partially, it may change its rhythm or volume, it might even just catch for a moment. Be vigilant, your breath is a trusted friend giving you useful feedback.

If you can learn to practice movement with a smooth, continuous breath, then your movement will improve all by itself.

How to deal with pain

Pain is a neurological phenomenon that is generated by your brain. Its purpose is to keep you safe. If you're experiencing pain, it means that your brain doesn't think that what you're doing is safe. It's a really good idea to listen to this.

If you have pain while doing a certain movement, then there are a few things you can do:

1. You can reduce the size of your movement until the pain no longer occurs. This may mean you are only doing tiny little movements. It could be half a centimetre. If that's what it takes to stop causing pain, then do it. You aren't missing anything by doing less. In fact, you're now retraining your brain that this movement is safe.
2. You can imagine the movement. The same regions of the motor cortex in your brain are activated when you imagine a movement as when you actually do it. This means imagining has the same effects as actually doing the movements.
3. Utilise the suggestions under the previous headings. Move slowly. Use less effort. Pay attention to comfort. Rest. Breath continuously. All of these things help to give your brain a sense of safety.