
MOVE TO IMPROVE



Alexander Technique

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If you've heard of the Alexander Technique, you probably think it's akin to yoga and Pilates, and that it's for improving posture and helping back pain. It will certainly do both these things, but that is the tip of the iceberg.

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It can best be described as a practice of embodied mindfulness by which you can learn to be fully aware and responsive in the present moment to everything that you are experiencing. This includes being aware of the ways in which you might be using your body that may be counterproductive, making everyday activities such as standing, sitting and walking more difficult and painful.

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The Alexander Technique can be a great tool to manage your axial SpA (AS) alongside your medication and exercise.

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It's important to be aware that the Alexander Technique isn't a cure or a treatment for back pain. But it has been shown to be effective for helping people manage their back pain.

Over time, most of us develop strategies for moving, sitting and standing that we think are 'right' or 'look good.' We may also develop strategies which will have a desired effect on other people's perception of us, whether to get them to like us, to leave us alone or any number of things. This can be referred to as 'being for others' rather than our authentic selves.

Think of how you feel when you are out and about, 'suited and booted' going to work and how you feel when you get home, shut the door behind you and are on your own or with those who know and appreciate you as you are.

Again, think about you feel when you are somewhere familiar with good friends and then how you feel at a large formal event with people you don't know or might want to impress.

This difference in how we feel, or lack of self-consciousness (even of our own bodies and how we look!) is the freedom to be who we really are, our authentic selves, that we can relearn by practising the Alexander Technique.

Imagine having that inner ease, confidence and poise or balance that comes from being inherently and effortlessly coordinated in all our movements, whatever we are doing. This is why the Alexander Technique has always been popular with sportspeople, musicians and other performers.

It won't in itself make you a better sportsperson or performer but it can teach you to use your body so you are able to accomplish an activity without obstructing yourself with unnecessary effort.

How does this relate to how you use your body?

Think of the people you see hunched over their mobile phone screens oblivious to people, traffic and to the shape they are twisting themselves into to focus on that screen. This isn't even 'being for others' it's 'being for your phone'.

There is a different way to look at your phone and it starts with pausing and choosing to be aware of and pay attention to all that you are experiencing right now, in this present moment.

- In your environment. Everything you can see, hear and smell
- In your body. Your breathing, pulse, digestion, aches, pain and discomfort
- In your mind. Your thoughts and feelings

In that moment you have the freedom to choose to change the way you are doing something.

There are many things that can be taught theoretically but the Alexander Technique isn't one of them. You will need to work with a teacher initially before being able to reproduce the changes in your own life.

Typically, at a first session the teacher will want to know what has brought you to them and what you are looking for help with. They will do some simple movement exercises with you, such as sitting, standing, walking and throwing and catching a ball. They will ask you how you feel when moving and show you some simple adjustments you can make.

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Alexander lessons are not painful. There is nothing physically aggressive about the work. On the contrary it is a process of allowing the pupil to release tension at a pace that suits them.

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A teacher uses their hands, gently placing them on your head neck or shoulders as you do some basic everyday movements. This helps them understand how you move and breathe.

Lessons usually last around 45 minutes during which the teacher's hands and words will gently guide you to release the muscular tension that you are holding. After six or so lessons you should be beginning to be able to do this for yourself. This could then either become an ongoing journey of personal development facilitated by your teacher or you may stop taking lessons at this point and, hopefully, will have learned something incredibly valuable that your body will remember and you will never completely lose.

To find a good teacher check out either of the two main organisations:
 Alexander Technique International www.alexandertechniqueinternational.com
 Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique www.alexandertechnique.co.uk