

## Poised For Life • Alexander Technique Teacher - Penny Spawforth

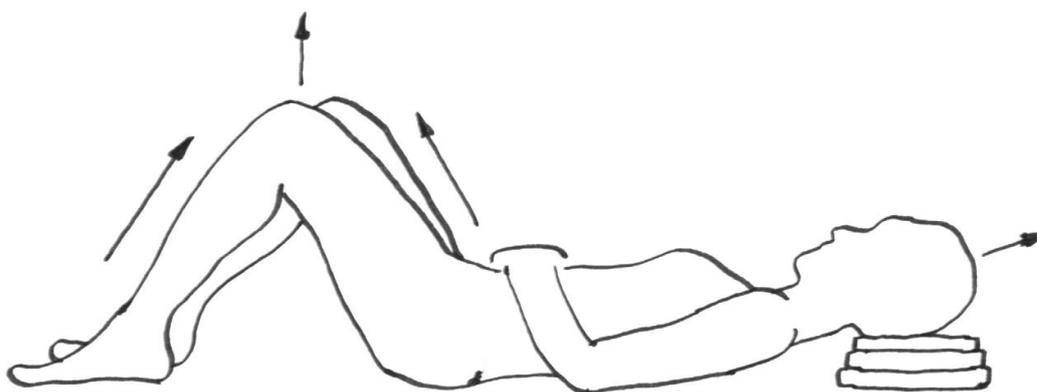
### Lying Down Work (Semi-supine)

This is an invaluable daily practice that encourages the changes the Alexander Technique aims to promote.

#### The Basic Position:

Lie on your back on a firm surface (a carpeted floor is best) with the knees bent so that the feet are drawn up as near to the body as comfortable. **Feet** should be far enough apart to enable the legs to balance with minimum effort (about shoulder width), the **knees** neither falling apart or together, but pointing up to the ceiling.

Place some paperback books under your **head** so that they are supporting the bony bump at the back of the head (the occiput). The books should not be in contact with the back of the neck. The height of the pile of books varies from person to person and may even vary at different times for the same person. It depends on many factors, e.g. the length of neck, size of head, curvature of spine. Reducing the size of the pile should not be seen as an end in itself. If you have too few books, your head will tend to tilt backwards (chin higher than forehead) and it will be difficult to encourage muscular release through the back and neck. If the pile is too high, your chin will press uncomfortably on your throat. The optimum height is somewhere between these two extremes. The **arms** should be placed with the **elbows** on the floor and the palms of the **hands** on your tummy.



#### Weight Bearing Points:

Ideally the weight should be distributed between the following points:

The feet -on the heel and the pads at the base of the big and the little toes

The back rim of the pelvis -a little below the waist

The shoulder blades

The back of the head

**Directions:**

Now you are ready to turn your attention to the activity of directing (simply a combination of mentally asking it to happen and releasing any tension which is preventing it from happening).

- 1) The neck muscles need to be released so that the crown of the head tends to move away from the shoulders in a direction best described as 'forwards and out [see arrows on diagram. The 'forward' element is required because the strongest and most frequently over-contracted muscles of the neck are those that pull on the back of the head.'
- 2) This direction of the head should be allowed to initiate a release and lengthening of the whole spine. As the spine lengthens, the back will naturally come into greater contact with the floor and will seem to broaden.
- 3) The knees should be directed towards the ceiling - which means a release and lengthening of the thigh muscles from the hip to the knees, and a similar release and lengthening of the calf muscles from the ankles to the knees [see arrows on diagram].

To sum up, direct the neck to release to allow the head to go forward and out, the back to lengthen and widen, and the knees to point towards the ceiling.

**Some Questions and Answers:**

**Q How often should I do this and for how long?**

A At least once a day for 10-20 minutes at a time.

**Q Can I do this lying on my bed or sofa?**

A Not with the same usefulness. A firm surface demands a response from the body that a soft one does not.

**Q How can I avoid just falling asleep?**

A If you find you have been day-dreaming for some time, gently bring your attention back to your body, sense the weight bearing points and begin directing again. If you persistently fall asleep you may be over tired and in need of more sleep generally.

**Q Is this akin to yoga relaxation and meditation exercises?**

A Not exactly. The aim is not to sink into the heaviness of total relaxation. It is an 'active' lying down, requiring mental alertness to promote a redistribution of muscle tone.

**Q Can I listen to the radio, watch TV or read while doing this?**

A Listening to the radio is probably all right. Watching TV or reading is too distracting and likely to fix the eyes, head and neck in an immobile position

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