

Feldenkrais Method®, Aging and Balance

By Joyce Ann OTR/L, GCFP

Do you feel muscle and joint pain that keep you from doing the things you like to do? Are you hesitant to join movement classes for fear of hurting yourself? Have you found traditional therapies to be too painful or unproductive, leaving you feeling frustrated and defeated? Is it difficult to stand up from a chair, look over your shoulder when driving, reach for items in your kitchen cabinets, or hold your grandchildren?

Awareness Through Movement® or Functional Integration® are the fastest way to change the brain's ability to function in daily life. These changes will last longer than just a few hours after the lesson ends.

Israeli scientist Moshe Feldenkrais DSc (1904-1984) was a nuclear physicist and engineer, and the first European to earn a black belt in judo. He received his doctorate in physics at the Sorbonne in Paris, and worked closely with Nobel Chemistry Laureate Joliot-Curie. During the 1940s, Dr. Feldenkrais was barely able to walk due to a serious knee injury and was given only a 50% chance of improving his condition with surgery, which he could not accept. He began exploring movement patterns, and observed how people form movement habits. He mastered the sciences of anatomy, kinesiology, and physiology, and combined these with his knowledge of physics, engineering, and judo. Eventually, he restored his ability to walk and began his life's work of helping others improve their functional abilities and to move through life with grace and dignity.

Walking and the risk of falling is just one of the many concerns for aging individuals and their family members. When individuals are afraid of falling, they may alter their movements, such as taking smaller steps, stiffening up their torso and/or leaning forward. Even though they believe this is keeping them from falling, they are actually increasing their risk. They are no longer able to pay attention to their surroundings and must focus their full attention on the act of the movement itself. Other individuals begin to lose functional abilities after an illness or injury, through weakness and/or rigidity.

There are times when traditional exercise may be too painful or demanding, leaving a person feeling frustrated or defeated. The Feldenkrais Method® can be learned in two modes. Awareness Through Movement® classes are taught to more than one individual at a time and the Functional Integration® (FI) lessons involve individual hands on interventions. Both modes teach individuals to improve movements habits by learning to differentiate and redistribute movements throughout their body, looking at and exploring the relationships between one area of the body and another. When effecting change in one area of the body, other areas are effected and therefore movement habits change. This allows individuals to normalize their muscle tone and utilize appropriate muscle groups in the appropriate situations.

Differentiation requires learning to move areas of his skeleton independently of other areas. Undifferentiated movements involve moving large areas as a unit using more primitive or simple movement patterns. Both are necessary so that in the appropriate circumstance, the individual can access the pattern necessary for the most efficient movement. When an individual is able to move physically with less effort, this allows for more efficiency in thought processes as well, since the individual is able to pay more attention to cognitive challenges without the distraction of the movement pattern

The Feldenkrais Method® will help the individual move more easily, walk more freely, lessen the risk for falling, and better enjoy simple things in life such as socializing, shopping, taking walks, holding their grandchildren, or cooking. This can enhance self-confidence and would be life changing.

“Movement is life.... Without movement, life is unthinkable.”-Moshe Feldenkrais DSc