

Natural Movement

A wise way of communicating with the body to strengthen bones and increase mobility

Story: Arja Sihvola

Pictures: Satu Nyström

Senior Feldenkrais Trainer Ruthy Alon has developed a *Movement Intelligence* program in which gentle natural movements improve the body's mobility — and at the same time strengthen bones.

Movements are made while standing, walking, lying down or sitting on the floor. As a tool she uses a long colorful fabric, wrapped around your hips, legs and shoulders, or turned into a crown to add to the weight of your head. And her movements range from slowly twisting in different directions while lying on your back or stomach, to bouncing while seated on the ground.

You do not use unnecessary force or effort. Bone tissue is constantly renewing itself, and her movements are meant to gently stimulate their natural growth. Her lessons guide your body to move smoothly even while carrying weight, so that all parts benefit, without any of them getting overworked.

Replacing Compulsion with Creative Exploration

Ruthy Alon was one of the first to study the Feldenkrais Method with its creator, Moshe Feldenkrais (1904–1984).

“My teacher encouraged and inspired us to explore and develop things on our own. Instead of learning theories

and taking measurements, we observed the relationship of different parts of the body to each other. How do movements of the leg affect the hips, back, shoulders and chest? Where else in your body do you feel that the movement of flexing your knee translates? Exploring the movements of the human body is like doing interesting laboratory work.

“Bones and muscles cooperate, and respond to each other's movements. In order to keep our bodies in good condition we must understand and support this cooperation. Movement Intelligence uses sensory guided movement to improve the inter-dependent relationship among all the different parts of the body, ensuring a healthy division of labor,” says Alon.

When only a single body part adopts a new position this can create problems, and call for corrective exercise. For example, jumping has been found to strengthen your bones, but if your body is misaligned then the movement is not safe.

An example Alon uses of balanced coordination among all body parts is African women who walk carrying heavy jugs of water on their heads.

“Their bones are strong because, when walking, they move not just their legs and hips in rhythm, but also their upper bodies. I use the weight of the fabric crown to guide us to find the ideal posture and optimal position of the head. When we feel weight on our heads, our bodies instinctively respond by stretching upwards, seeking equilibrium.”

“We can learn to move smoothly, quietly, and without risking injury”

Back to Nature

According to Ruthy Alon, many health ailments are simply due to the fact that we no longer make full-bodied natural movements. When was the last time you rocked on a swing? When was the last time you went climbing, using both hands and feet, and your *entire* self?

“In the past, everyday activities were sufficient to maintain our bone health. But we no longer chop wood, or go for long walks, where we strengthened our abilities out of necessity. I have nothing against the many labor saving devices and inventions that have come into our lives. I only regret that this means we tend to use our bodies in limited, mechanical ways: we stiffen ourselves, and move only one body part at a time. These unnatural ways of moving become habit, and we do not realize the harm we are doing to ourselves, and to our health.”

Ruthy Alon hopes that we will, little by little, wiser up to our storehouse of bad habits, and gradually learn better ways of being and moving.

“When an infant is first learning to crawl, or turn over onto its stomach and back, he tries, listens, and eventually discovers the most viable way. In the same manner we can also gradually rediscover how to move as nature meant: softly, gently, quietly and safely. We can always learn by going back to an earlier time.

“We can also do a lot of things that are good for our bones. No human being needs to deteriorate prematurely. If you do not move well, then life in

general will be a difficult struggle, rather than rewarding, pleasurable, and beautiful,” declares 80-year old Ruthy Alon. Look at her, and you see for yourself the truth in her words.

Movement Intelligence [sidebar]

For whom?

Suitable for people of any age, physical condition, or prior experience.

How do I do it?

Movements are controlled and mindful, going at the body’s own pace while listening to, and respecting, its messages.

What are the Benefits?

- Stimulates natural regeneration of bone tissue
- Guides you to find your own optimal alignment
- Develops a balance between mobility and stability
- Strengthens the cooperation among different parts of the body
- Guides you to correctly distribute your body weight
- Activates the creativity of the brain in finding new movement possibilities

Effortless Change [sidebar]

Ruthy Alon taught a course in Helsinki last fall. Here are some of the participants’ comments:

“My body became more present and available to me, wider and taller.”

“I’m amazed how light I feel! Free of effort, following the body’s own wisdom.”

“Working with the length of fabric was remarkable. It filled me with energy!”

“When making these simple movements I felt them reach deep into my core, somewhere very primal, strong and innocent.”