

The Lying Down Procedure

The Alexander Technique is, above all, a practical discipline. Alexander often referred to the “practice and theory” (rather than the other way around) of his work, in order to emphasise his conviction that the pragmatic and tangible aspects of his technique were of primary importance.

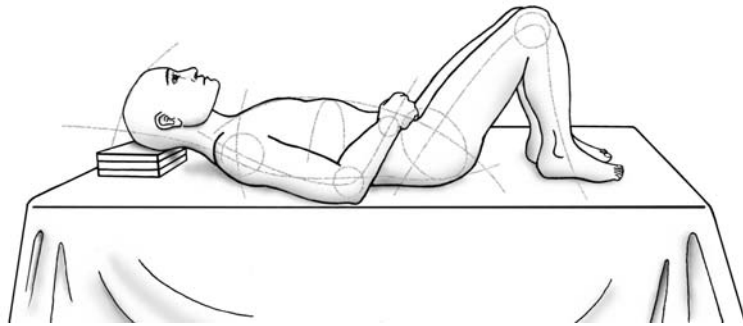
This lying down procedure can be practised with great benefit with little or no theoretical knowledge of the Alexander Technique, and even if you think you know all the theory in the world, this simple practice can always show you something new. The *semi-supine*¹ position is the most basic and important way of working on yourself; it provides a systematic activity through which to release unnecessary tension and to become more aware of the relationship between your head, neck and back which forms the “core” of your structure.

The Procedure

Lie on your back on a firm, flat surface with your

- head raised on a pile of paperback books – your teacher will tell you how tall a pile you need,
- knees about hip-width apart and directed straight towards the ceiling,
- feet flat on the floor, comfortably apart and fairly close to your buttocks,
- hands resting on your body, not clasped together, somewhere between your hip bones and your lower ribs,
- eyes open.

It can be useful to lie down to quieten and calm yourself but, in contrast to a conventional relaxation exercise, this procedure embodies the following.



- The raised position of the head and legs allows gradually more and more of the back to be supported directly by the floor.

- Balancing the legs – so that the knees don’t fall together or apart – and keeping the eyes open both help to keep your sense of balance engaged.

- You should avoid “going inside yourself”; the idea is to expand your field of awareness, not deliberately to narrow it. Use your eyes, ears and other senses to inform you constantly about your surroundings.

- The position, gravity and your intention to “leave yourself alone” all combine to create a light stretch throughout your back. Think in terms of stretch and expansion rather than the sort of relaxation which may result in your becoming dull and unresponsive.

- Lying on a fairly hard surface such as a carpeted floor allows you gradually to refine your awareness of your back.

Ideally, find time to lie down once or twice every day for fifteen to twenty minutes.

Aim to learn to use the firm contact of the floor to inform you about the muscular texture – the relative states of stiff tension, floppy relaxation and springy expansion of your back.

When you want to get up, don’t sit up, roll over slowly first.

¹ To lie *supine* is to lie face up (as distinct from *prone* – face down). To lie fully *supine* one would simply lie out straight. The Alexander lying down position is described as *semi-supine* because of the raised position of the legs, head and hands.