



SENSEABILITY

A newsletter of applications
of the *Feldenkrais Method*
of somatic education
written by *Guild Certified*
Feldenkrais
Practitionerssm

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The Shoulders

Rib “Cage” or Rib “Basket?” *by Pamela Kihm, GCFP*

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Most of us grew up calling the bony structure that surrounds and protects the heart and lungs a “rib cage” but, is it constructed to be more of a cage or a basket? This is a very fundamental question because if you truly think of your thorax as a “cage,” you might move with more rigidity. Terminology can affect our perception and performance. Specifically, let’s think about how this terminology could affect the comfort of your shoulders:

Select a chair that has a firm seat and no arm rests. Sit in that chair with your feet flat on the floor, a comfortable distance apart.

Imagine for the moment that your thorax really is a bone-bolted-to-bone “cage” as you reach up to the ceiling with your right arm. Notice how high you can reach when you pretend to have a rib “cage.”

Allow your shoulders and arms to rest, but don’t slouch.

With your shoulders and arms relaxed let your ribs fold (collapse) by bending to the left and then to the right. You can do this because, in the front of you, your ribs are connected to your sternum (breastbone) with movable cartilage. In the back of you, your ribs are jointed to individual movable vertebrae.

Gently alternate side-to-side several times. This is sort of like a slinky toy making an arc down a stair. Allow the shoulder to follow downward as that side folds, then allow the other shoulder to follow downward as the other side folds.

You may even discover that the top of your head follows the folding to one side and then the other because your ribs are jointed to your spine and your spine extends up under your skull. Could you do this if your thorax really was a rib “cage?”

Now, remaining as relaxed as possible without slouching, allow the left side of your rib “basket” to fold to the left as you reach up with your right arm. Notice that as the left side of your rib basket folds to the left, and your left shoulder rides downward, your right shoulder rides upward. As the left side of your rib basket folds, the right side opens up. Notice how high you can reach.

Alternate between (1) reaching up to the ceiling with your right arm without the ribs helping; and (2) allowing both shoulders to be relaxed as you reach toward the ceiling with your right arm while allowing the right side of your rib basket to fan open as the left side of your rib basket folds. Notice how high you can reach in each case.

Place your middle three fingertips on the front of the lowest part of your sternum. The bottom of your sternum is located where your ribs “V” up around your diaphragm. Your rib basket can fold and open side-to-side even more if you allow your sternum to be moved on a diagonal by the action of your ribs.

As your ribs fold on the left side, encourage the bottom of your sternum to slide a bit to the right. As your ribs fold on the right side, encourage the bottom of your sternum to slide a bit to the left. So you can feel the difference, fold your rib basket side-to-side without your sternum moving. Do this a few times.

As you reach up with your right arm, allow the bottom of your sternum to slide to the right while your ribs on the right side fan open and the ribs on left side fold. Notice how high you can reach now.

This article contains excerpts from Pamela’s second book, titled, “Pain-Free Choices For Those With Osteoarthritis.”

Helping People to “Rediscover Their Arms”

—by Stacey Barrows, GCFP

As a physical therapist that specializes with shoulders, I have seen problems following surgeries, accidents and poor usage. My training as a therapist has helped me find ways for people to jump-start their recovery but as a Feldenkrais practitioner, I have found ways to help them rediscover their arms.

A woman came to me because of severe pain in her shoulder. She was unsuccessful with stretching and regular exercise. “Susan” was a piano player and had deep wishes to return to her playing but, because of her shoulder pain, she was unable. She had had a surgery that repaired the rotator cuff tendons of her shoulder, but after rehabilitation and many exercises, she was unable to do what she wanted to do: play the piano without pain. From her physical therapy, Susan understood what good mechanics were for her shoulder, but she was unable to actually perform these mechanical changes.

We started with her touching her arm and feeling for the areas that gave her pain. She was amazed to find out that these same areas seemed to be vague in her sense of her body. There was a significant scar that she was massaging too strongly, so I had her soften her touch. Next, I invited her to notice how her shoulder blade felt with the movement with her breath. She came to notice that the blade rose and fell with her breath, as if it were something riding a wave or current. This seemed to allow her to sense her

shoulder blade more clearly. I had her drawing a circle with the motion of her shoulder blade (*See Shouler Clock lesson on page 4*). While lying on her side, we also related the movement of her shoulder blade to movements of her fingers. She began to create piano scales with a new awareness of her upper body. We progressed to exploring her abilities to sit with ease and use less of her neck muscles so her arm could work more efficiently. This enabled her to start using the computer with little pain. Next, I had her imagine piano scales using this newly found ease with her arm. She then progressed to playing tunes and asked when she could return to playing the piano.

Finally, we returned to playing the piano to find that she not only was able to play with much less pain but with a more coordinated feeling with her fingertips. I have found that people who come to improve their shoulder mechanics through the *Feldenkrais Method* not only discover ways to move the arm with more ease and comfort but discover that many of their daily habits create interference. I have become a better physical therapist by using the *Feldenkrais Method* and I love the creative ways I can assist my students to make the best recovery possible.

Stacey Barrows is a physical therapist and co-director of Century City Physical Therapy, Inc.

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Vital Use of Your Arms

—by Pati Holman, GCFP

Do you notice that you are lifting your arms overhead less and less as the years progress? Recent scientific studies show an increase in the number of rotator capsule tears in the general population with each decade of age. How many of these problems are the result of ineffectual use of the arms or lack of use of the arms in dynamic movement?

Recent archeological discoveries of the Orrorin bones gathered in 2000 (Martin Pickford and Brigitte Senut-Chad, Africa) can be used to support the importance of using our arms in organically functional ways such as reaching overhead, grasping with arms extended, pulling, or the function of the arms that requires us to bring them “away” from the sides of our torsos. The familiar progression of Homo sapiens from quadruped to biped is being seriously reexamined with the discovery of Orrorin’s femur bone. This femur shows that Orrorin, dated at six to seven million years old, had the ability to walk on two legs! This is remarkable in that a) it’s the first evidence of bipedalism since the discovery of Lucy, our oldest hominid relative, discovered in the mid 1970’s, and b) that Orrorin was a tree dweller... having used the arms overhead extensively. Unlike Lucy, it is believed Orrorin didn’t walk predominantly on the forest floor, but lived in the trees and used its arms for hanging, swinging, food gathering, etc. When the climate changed around six to seven million years ago with the resultant deforestation, the Orrorin hominid dropped from the trees onto the Savannah, a more plains-like environment, where uprightness was key to survival.

How does that affect you and me? Why is it that we become more likely to have tissue damage as we age in the location of the rotator cuff? One explanation would be the familiar use-it-or-lose-it phenomenon.

The discovery of Orrorin bones validates that we had extensive functional overhead use of the arms long ago

and that in our current modern day (only a fraction of a second in geological time), we are witnessing/experiencing structural degradation from lack of functional use.

The key to maintaining vital use of the arms is to use them as nature intended. It is recommended that you use the arms in weight bearing to exercise your evolutionary inheritance. Activities such as rock climbing or tree climbing, learning a martial art, yoga inversions using the arms for support, lifting weights, or gardening on all fours are all excellent activities. But remember, these activities can be troublesome if you don’t sense and feel an integrated use of the arms. The *Feldenkrais* teacher is expert at giving you the tools for integrated action. In *Awareness Through Movement*® classes, you practice variations of differentiated and undifferentiated arm movements in relationship to the head, in relation to the ribs, in relation to the pelvis and in relation to the feet, the purpose of which is to give you a sense that when the arm acts, so does the spine and pelvis, and that weight shift occurs in your feet as a result. Fully integrated use of the arms is effortless and distributed throughout the entire self. Shoulders frozen from injury or trauma, shoulder or elbow tendonitis due to overuse or poor use, and muscular pain from either of these can be undone simply and without effort. Students in my classes with shoulder tendonitis and chronic rotator cuff problems gain a greater sense of the relationships between the scapula and the spine, the head and the pelvis. This takes away the unnecessary effort in the shoulder musculature and soft tissues. Healing results from integrated use of the arms with the entire self.

Visit your local *Feldenkrais* teacher to begin the process of healthy, vital living.

Patricia Holman has a private practice in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her website is <www.Feldenkraisnet.com>.

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Shoulder Clock Lesson by Stacey Barrows, GCFP

1. Lie on your right side and support your head with a pillow or your right arm. Rest your left hand on the floor in front of you with your elbow slightly bent. Bend your knees slightly to rest comfortably on your side.
2. Observe where your shoulder blade is and feel how it responds to your breath. Does it move with your breath and how does it move?
3. Imagine a clock on the ceiling with 12:00 in the direction of your head and 6:00 in the direction of your feet. Gently slide your shoulder blade in the direction of 12:00, and back to where you started. How easily does it move? Does it move in a straight line or does it meander around? How smooth is the movement? Don't try to over-do and instead do the movement gently to observe the quality of your motion.
4. Move the shoulder blade in the opposite direction, to 6:00. How does this compare? How does your breath move, and how does it relate to the movement of your shoulder blade?
5. Slide your shoulder blade in the forward direction, toward 3:00 on your imaginary clock. Does your body roll forward or back with this movement?
6. Slide the shoulder blade in the opposite direction, toward 9:00. Which is the easier direction, 3:00 or 9:00?
7. Gently move your shoulder blade in a circle clockwise, traveling from 12:00 to 3:00 to 6:00 to 9:00 and back up to 12:00.
8. Reverse the direction. Observe how you are breathing, the ease of your movement and how the rest of you moves.
9. Sit up and compare the two sides of your body. What differences do you notice between the two sides?
10. Lie on your left side and follow the directions, but this time just do the movements in your imagination. Are you able to do the movements gently and without holding your breath?
11. Sit up again and compare the two sides of your body. What differences do you feel now?
12. Stand up and walk around and feel how your arms move as you walk. Do you feel your arms swing with a new sense of ease as you walk?

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