

## The Feldenkrais Method® and Me

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**Six years ago I was diagnosed with osteoarthritis.** At first I had severe pain in my right groin. Soon after, walking became an agonizing experience and sitting also became torturous. An x-ray revealed I had no cartilage on my right hip and very little on my left one. The orthopedist told me to take Advil, go have fun and come back for hip replacement surgery when I couldn't stand the pain any more.

As the pain worsened, I did call the doctor again. At this point he suggested prescription painkillers or nine Advil a day. I chose the latter but also decided I would try some alternatives. I requested that the doctor approve some water therapy for me which I followed faithfully for six months, with no noticeable results. As a result of reading, I had also started a regimen of Cosamin DS that I am still following today, which has made me more comfortable overall.

At this point, I heard about the *Feldenkrais Method* and began taking classes. By this time I was limping, and getting around was becoming more and more difficult.

My *Feldenkrais* teacher was nurturing but firm. When I started *Feldenkrais* lessons, I only felt comfortable immediately after the class. My progress has been slow but steady. **I now attend classes twice a week and would be lost without them.** I haven't been on Advil for years. At my very worst, I had to forfeit a trip to China, but a year later, I took a trip to Greece and climbed up the Parthenon, a major victory for me.

**Now I can walk, sit and climb, usually with little or no discomfort.** I no longer limp. I feel more flexible and limber than I ever have, and I do not feel restricted in my daily activities. Unless something unforeseen happens, I do not contemplate needing a hip replacement in the future. Thanks to the *Feldenkrais Method*, my teacher, and some motivation on my part to avoid an operation, I am leading a comfortable, busy life. ●●

—by Jane Larus,  
a student of Barbara Leverone, GCFT.

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## Surviving Pumps

Whether you're buying cross trainers or stilettos, there is a lot more to choosing shoes than color, style, and the way they fit your feet. The wrong shoes can look fabulous but make you feel awful all over. **Here are some savvy shoe shopping guidelines based on principles of the *Feldenkrais Method*.** Take them with you on your next shoe shopping expedition and have some fun discovering if a shoe really fits.

The next time you're trying on shoes, experiment a little while the salesperson is off searching for your size. Kick off your shoes, pull off your socks and stand barefoot. **Notice the way you stand without the interference of shoes.** First, take a moment to notice the way that your weight is distributed on each foot. Is your weight more toward the insides of the feet (pronation) or more toward the outside (supination)? Is your weight back on your heels or more toward your toes? Can you freely shift your weight on your feet in all directions? Can you feel how your knees, hips, and back adjust to your movement?

**Next, notice your toes.** Ideally, each toe acts as a little rudder, directing the forces of movement through your skeleton to keep you balanced on your feet. How many of your toes are in contact with the floor? Wiggle your toes in all directions and find out how many of them are free to respond to your movement. After a thorough toe wiggle, stand quietly again, feel the distribution of your weight on your feet again and shift it around. Did something change once you got your toes moving?

For a moment, remain standing in your bare feet and squeeze your toes gently together. Hold them as if they are in shoes with pointy toes and notice what changes for you. What happens to your weight distribution? How free are you to shift around on your feet? Does your breathing change? Does something in the shape or the muscle tone of your back change? Walk around with your toes stuck together and feel your stride length, your balance, and the amount of work in your hips, back, and neck. **Then, liberate your toes and walk again.**

**Which style of movement feels more comfortable?** Once you have established a sense of yourself without shoes you can begin searching for shoes that serve your personal needs. Try on your first pair, stand up, and take time to go through the same process that you just did barefoot. Are you more or less free to balance and shift your weight in these shoes? **Are your toes at your service or are they in shoe prison?** If these shoes pass the first test, then imagine the activities for which you might wear this particular pair. Spend some time auditioning these shoes for their role. If you're buying pumps to wear with a cocktail dress, don't just walk around in the store, but also stand still on a hard floor as well as on a squishy carpet and wait to see how you and the shoes settle into this position. Look up, look right, look left, shift from foot to foot, then finally sit down and stand up several times.

If you're buying everyday shoes you should do the standing test as well. Also, walk around slowly, walk quickly, change directions abruptly, stand on your tiptoes, squat down, lift something and carry it about, and sit with your legs stretched out and pretend that you're driving the car. **Don't be subtle, make the shoes prove their suitability.**

After you've put these shoes through their paces, take them off and stand barefoot again. Indulge in some exuberant toe wiggling. Do you feel a sense of relief or liberation? Do you become significantly more comfortable and relaxed? If so, you were working to wear those shoes, and the shoes were not working for you. Close your eyes and ask yourself honestly, "Am I better off with them or without them?" **Then move on with your new awareness and choose something exactly right for you. ●●**

—by Candace Conino, GCFT.  
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## Walking is with the Whole Body

From the first time Robert walked into my office, his walking was quite distinctive. His mother had made the initial appointment as a birthday present for Robert—for his leg pain. Robert, who was 42, was using a four-pronged cane to aid him in his walk. Even with the use of a cane, each time he lifted his left leg to take a step, it seemed both difficult and precarious. It turned out that Robert had been born with Cerebral Palsy, and though he had led an active life, after a couple of falls over the last five years, he had started to use a cane when walking, and now couldn't walk without it.

**After three *Functional Integration*<sup>®</sup> lessons done in a variety of positions, mostly with Robert lying on his side or back, he said that his hip and leg were feeling quite a bit better.** I could notice an increased ease in the movement of his left leg, and a general softening and a differentiation though out his back and chest. There was however only minor improvement in his walking. It seemed to me that the reason he could not lift his left leg very easily was not due to any problem with the leg, but because his pelvis was not shifting in a way that would free up the left leg to lift and swing forwards in order to take a step.

In the fourth lesson we looked at the role of his pelvis and spine in shifting his weight. Robert sat on my low table, and rested his arms on the high table. I sat behind him and helped him shift his weight from one buttock to the other. By placing my hands at various positions along his spine, I helped him sense how to integrate the movement of his spine with the movement of his pelvis. His pelvis started to move more freely. His left buttock, which initially barely budged from the table, suddenly lifted and moved as easily as the right. His head started to be more erect. Robert started to smile and to hum and to laugh. Something profound was happening for him, and I continued to structure the lesson to facilitate his progress. We also

experimented with shifting the pelvis forwards and backwards and relating that movement to rounding and arching the back.

Forty-five minutes flew by, and then it was time to stop. Robert stood up. As usual, I handed him his cane. His walking was noticeably more fluid. His left foot lifted without difficulty. The ease and improvement Robert had achieved moving his pelvis while sitting had translated to an improvement in walking. He stopped and then he pushed his cane to the floor with a dramatic flourish, and started to walk unaided. I had some concerns—I didn't want him to fall, but decided to go with it. With me following close behind, he set off. As I was relieved to see, he was doing fine, more than fine actually, and after a few halting steps, he was walking smoothly. **It was a stunning shift. It seemed to be that he had put things together from this and previous lessons, which enabled him to coordinate his whole body so that he could once again balance and move freely when walking.**

We had not talked about how he “should” walk, nor practiced any specific walking strategies. He knew when he was ready. I did advise him to continue to take the cane with him in case he needed it. We worked together a few more times, concentrating on movements that he could practice at home to continue his progress.

Many students receiving *Feldenkrais* lessons make profound progress without such dramatic changes. **But Roberts's breakthrough does illustrate how changes to something as seemingly fixed as walking, are possible by improving the coordination of the body as a whole. ●●**

—by Andrew Wright, GCFT.

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## Fun Walks

Here is an exploration of walking that is an enjoyable way to turn your walking into an easy, efficient, full body activity. Do this somewhere where you won't be self-conscious, or take a child to share the fun! Let yourself giggle and have some childish delight as you do this. Although we will be exaggerating our movements, make sure that everything feels good and that you don't exaggerate any movement to the point of discomfort.

Walk slowly enough so that you can notice how you walk. Does your pelvis move? If so, does it mostly rotate, tuck under, or do something else? Do your shoulders swing? Does your spine move?

Now exaggerate the swing of your pelvis. How does it feel to walk that way? Does your spine participate more? Let go of the exaggerated pelvic swing. Now tuck your pelvis under so that your tailbone moves forward as you reach forward with one foot, and then bring your tailbone back and arch your spine as the foot comes back. Now tuck your pelvis under as the other foot comes forward, and bring your tailbone back to that foot. Which side is easier?

Relax. Now as you walk, lift one hip and then the other. Relax. Now walk normally and see if your walk has changed.

If you are in a place where you can safely do so, walk backwards. How does this differ from your forward walk? Now repeat the same variations in a backwards walk. Walk forward again. Has your walk changed? Does your pelvis move differently? How about your arms? Does your spine move with the walk?

For even more fun, make up your own variations. Reach high with one or both arms, tilt your head to one side, or exaggerate your arm swing. If you have a child with you, let the child make up the variations! Finish with observing your walk again, including pelvic movement, arm swing, and spinal movement. ●●

—by Ann Harman, GCFT.  
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## Walking on the Earth

Have you ever walked outdoors at dawn and sensed the earth turn on its axis towards the sun? Try it sometime and see what happens. As we hurry to and fro, it's so easy to take our steps for granted. But lose that carefree rhythm, and each step becomes precious. Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh says we don't have to walk in space or on water to experience a miracle... walking on the green Earth is a miracle.

Sarah is a woman in mid-life with two grown children. **After a disabling bout with Lyme disease, she felt that her feet “refused to follow orders.”** Her gait was disturbed and simple tasks became hazardous. One evening she broke her ankle as she walked across her bedroom! Now her determination to stay mobile was burdened by more pain and weakness.

**At this point, Sarah's massage therapist sent her to me for *Functional Integration* lessons.** She made immediate and rapid progress; her feet found their way; and her gait became stable and fluid. “In the aftermath of Lyme disease, *Feldenkrais* lessons contributed to my entire sense of well-being. The movements improved my fine motor skills. **Also, because I was walking all wrong, it tired me out.** I knew I was walking incorrectly, but I didn't know how to correct the problem—now that I'm walking better, I have more stamina,” she explains.

Walking is a boon for all ages—it builds bone, aids digestion, and banishes depression. It's a great way to be outdoors with friends and loved ones. When we nourish the neurologic “roots” of walking—integrating arms, legs, chest and pelvis—we take off down the road with confidence and pleasure. Enjoy your daily miracle, walk on the green Earth. ●●

—by Deedee Eisenberg, GCFT.  
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