

The Alexander Technique—Semi-Supine Position

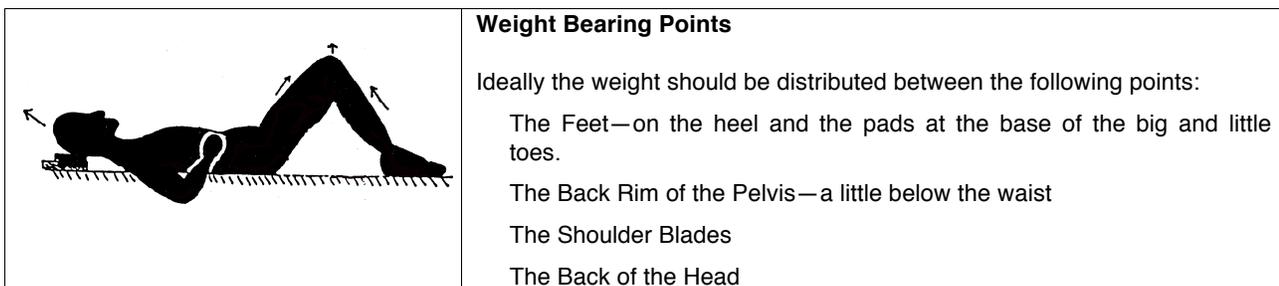
John and Lynn Nicholls, 1983

This is an invaluable practice that encourages the changes the Alexander Technique aims promote.

The Basic Position

Lie on your back on a firm surface—a carpeted floor is best—with the knees bent so that the feet are drawn up as near to the body as is comfortable. Feet should be far enough apart to enable the legs to balance with minimum effort (about shoulder width). The knees are neither falling apart or pulling together, but are pointing up to the ceiling.

Place some paperback books under your head so that they are supporting the bony bump at the back of the head (the occiput). The books should *not* be in contact with the back of the neck. The height of the pile of books varies from person to person, and may even vary at different times for the same person. It depends on many factors e.g. length of neck, size of head, curvature of spine. Reducing the size of the pile of books should not be seen as an end in itself. If you have too few books, your head will tend to tilt backwards (chin higher than forehead) and it will be difficult to encourage muscular release through the back and neck. If the pile is too high, your chin will press uncomfortably on your throat. The optimum height is somewhere between these two extremes. The arms may be placed with the elbows on the floor and the palms of the hands across the midriff.



Direction

Now you are ready to turn your attention to the activity of directing.

- 1) The neck muscles need to be released so that the head tends to move away from the body in a direction from the body best described as “forward and out” (see arrows on Diagram). The “forward” element is required because the strongest and most frequently over-contracted muscles of the neck are those that pull on the back of the head.
- 2) This direction of the head should be allowed to initiate a release and lengthening of the whole spine. As the spine lengthens, the back will naturally come into greater contact with the floor and will seem to broaden.
- 3) The knees should be directed towards the ceiling, meaning a release and lengthening of the thigh muscle from the hip to the knee, and a similar release and lengthening of the calf muscles from the ankle to the knee (see arrows on diagram).

To sum up, direct the neck to release to allow the head to go forward and out, the back to lengthen and widen, and the knees to point towards the ceiling.

Some Questions and Answers

Q. How often should I do this and for how long?

A. Preferably every day for 15-20 minutes at a time. At first, shorter periods may be advisable, especially if the back tires.

Q. Can I do this lying on my bed or sofa?

A. Not with the same usefulness. A firm surface demands a response from the body that a soft one does not.

Q. How can I avoid just falling asleep or drifting into day-dreams?

A. If you find you have been day-dreaming for some time, gently bring your attention back to your body, sense the weight bearing points and begin directing again. If you persistently fall asleep, you may be over-tired and in need of more sleep generally.

Q. Is this akin to yoga relaxation and meditation exercises?

A. Not exactly. The aim is not to sink into the heaviness of total relaxation. It is an “active” lying down, requiring mental alertness to promote a redistribution of muscle tensions.

Q. Can I listen to the radio, watch TV or read while doing this?

A. Listening to the radio is probably all right. Watching TV or reading is too distracting and likely to fix the eyes, head and neck in an immobile position.