

RESOLVING REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY WITH THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

by Joan Arnold

Being a professional writer is hard enough without the distractions of pain and tension. Those working at computers often suffer from back problems, aching shoulders or repetitive strain injury. Such symptoms most often arise from our movement style: the way we sit, stand, type or concentrate. By slumping or tensing muscles, we unconsciously sustain pressure on joints and the delicate tissues in the wrist and hand. The cumulative effect of that compression can result in repetitive strain.

RSI has threatened or destroyed careers. One writer told me that some major New York City publications had icing rooms where writers could plunge their throbbing wrists into the freezing cold, reducing their inflammation enough to return to work. Icing or anti-inflammatory drugs may temporarily reduce pain or swelling, but symptoms are the body's way of waving a red flag, signaling imbalance.

One of my clients suffering from RSI had quit her academic job and ceased writing because of her worsening pain. Asked what she would like to achieve with her Alexander work, her answer was heartbreakingly ordinary: she wanted to be able to pick up a quarter. After a series of weekly Alexander lessons, her pain and numbness were gone; she regained her dexterity. She had also acquired an important skill: the capacity to sense the onset of tension and release it. She has now returned to work on a book she has wanted to write for years.

If the symptoms of RSI are all too familiar to you — tingling, loss of dexterity, shooting pain or numbness — it is crucial to heed them as soon as possible. By studying the Alexander Technique, you can change their underlying cause. A proven method of self care, the Technique can help you avoid or recover from common problems such as carpal tunnel syndrome, persistent fatigue, chronic pain, tension headaches or back problems.

An Alexander Technique teacher is a highly trained movement and posture professional. When you go for an Alexander lesson, your teacher observes how you move, sit and function. S/he can then pinpoint compressive movement habits and help you release them, enabling you to move more efficiently and comfortably. Such changes can relieve pain and often solve the problem entirely. Taught in private individually tailored sessions, the Technique is cost-efficient and non-invasive, with no adverse side effects. Trained in the unique, soothing Alexander touch, a teacher can help you access an untapped reservoir of physical freedom and ease.

Another client — a young woman who spent her entire day working at a computer — had ignored the cumulative symptoms of RSI for three years, until she became unable to work. After six months of lessons, she says that "the Alexander Technique enabled me to minimize pain and avoid further damage. I learned how to concentrate when I was in pain, to release tension and feel circulation return to my hands. Improving postural habits is essential for anyone who works on a computer all day. But the most important benefit

of the Technique is a feeling of control: now I know I can use my new physical skills to change my situation."

Medication or surgery, though sometimes necessary, address the symptoms of back pain, shoulder problems or RSI. The Alexander Technique addresses the cause — your movement style — and gives you the ability to shift it. A holistic approach, it soothes your entire system. It enables you to use your body and mind more efficiently, improving concentration and endurance. By eliminating the internal static of pain and tension, you can better attune to your work. Rather than thinking about your aching shoulders or painful wrists, you can think about how you'd like to make that next paragraph sing.

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