

SEMI-SUPINE PRACTICE  
FOR PEOPLE FAMILIAR WITH MINDFULNESS BASED  
HEALTH MANAGEMENT

You may be familiar with the lying down posture which is called semi-supine from meditation practice, perhaps doing a "body scan meditation" in this position.

There are important differences in the way that we work in this position in the Alexander Technique to how it can be adapted as a way of enabling meditation for people with pain or fatigue. These guidance notes do two things:

- A) Guide you through a self-led session of doing semi-supine
- B) Highlight simple but important differences between Alexander practice semi-supine and doing a body awareness meditation.

SELF LED SEMI-SUPINE PRACTICE

Lie down on a firm surface e.g the floor with a mat or blanket under you to provide a small amount of cushioning and warmth. You will need a few paperback books to place under your head as shown you by your Alexander teacher. These are enough to allow the head to rest comfortably on the books without either pulling the head backwards or compressing the throat forwards. Place the books so they are not right up near your shoulders. This is because your back may lengthen while you are lying down and needs space to expand. Your feet are placed flat on the floor, about hip width apart with your knees bent upwards towards the ceiling. Place your elbows on the floor with your arms semi-flexed and your hands on your stomach or abdomen, in whatever way is most comfortable for you. It is helpful to allow your hands to lie still, resting not moving, gripping or pressing them.

This position enables our body to undo the tightening and tension patterns that build up doing daily activity. In particular it enables the spine to give itself a daily refreshment. Spinal discs become contracted during activity, losing fluid, and this position literally allows the spinal fluid in the discs to "plump-up" again.

In Alexander technique the practice of semi-supine or "active rest" is creating tone in our muscles, throughout our whole "muscular suit". It leads to a quality of springy supple-

ness and pliability throughout our system. We do this by training our mind and muscles to work together.

(2)

1. Keep your eyes open, mouth closed and breathe through the nose. Eyes are included in the balance mechanisms of the body which help us to know where our body is in space.

2. Bring your attention to the neck, especially where the spine meets the head. Choose to not tighten muscles there, and allow any possible release.

3. Notice the points of contact that your body makes with the surface you are lying on. Allow muscles to be at rest, quietening the nervous system.

4. Ask your head and tailbone to release away from each other, but not doing anything with your muscles. This allows natural lengthening to happen. Be aware of the soles of the feet, asking them to have good contact with the floor, this helps the crown of the head to release away from the feet.

5. Allow your shoulders to widen away from the spine and each other, simply sending a thought wish. There is nothing we can do with our muscles to enable this to happen. Just ask and the nervous system will learn to respond, helping to free breathing. Like-wise with the pelvic area and the hip joints. Ask the strong muscles that surround that area to not grip, this enables release and expansion to occur in the pelvic area.

6. Send your knees up to the ceiling and sky. Choose to not tighten muscles in the thighs or the calves. Notice again the feet, resting full on the floor, and the releasing hips allowing the knees to go up - and adding a wish for the knees to go away from each other. (This counteracts the tendency for the knees to draw together).

To conclude, bring the mind back to the neck, high below the skull. Once again simply wishing :

- let my neck be free
- to allow the crown of my head to release away from the nodding joint
- to allow my back to lengthen and widen

- so my knees can release out from my hips and away from each other.

ENJOY!

(3)

### HOW IS ALEXANDER WORK DIFFERENT FROM BODY AWARENESS MEDITATION?

In body scan meditation we are cultivating awareness of our body through becoming more familiar with the sensations in our body at any particular moment. Allowing them simply to be as they are. Awareness of itself causes change.

In Alexander Technique we are sending instructions from our minds to our nervous system to enable our body to become more fully toned, integrated and flexible. Alexander Technique also uses awareness as an agent of change to help with this specific aim.

It is important to be clear whether one is doing a Body scan meditation or Alexander Semi-supine at any particular time. The two practices are complementary but different. As one becomes more experienced with both it is possible to let the boundaries become more fluid and introduce elements of each into the other practice.