

Fine tuning your body is all in the mind...

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If you're sitting, as you read this, are you aware of the way you are sitting? Are both your feet on the floor? Are your knees apart or together? Is your back against the chair? What are you doing with your chest? Are you confused as to why I'm asking you all these questions?

Now you know how I felt when I

"I feel taller and get a sense of my entire side working as a whole rather than in separate parts"

attended Sabine Volkmann for a Feldenkrais session. On arriving late due to traffic and getting lost, I'm a bit wound up and can see in hindsight that part of my disorientation afterwards was the change in pace.

In today's 'fix it and fast' culture, Feldenkrais is disconcertingly slow. I'm invited to sit on the bed. Here I get the once-over by Sabine who sits opposite me as I turn to my left and to my right.

Within those few minutes, her carefully trained eye gathers plenty of information about how my body is functioning – stuff of which I'm unaware. The rest of the session is spent working with me to create an awareness within, not of what I am doing with my body but of how I do it. As Feldenkrais, the Russian physicist and engineer who developed the method, said: "If you know what you do, you can do what you want."

Sabine also makes gentle physical adjustments as I lie on the bed, starting with my left foot

and working up my whole left side. I feel taller and get a sense of the entire side working as a whole rather than in separate parts.

Conscious that the session is nearly up, I wonder how she is going to find the time to work on my right hand side to balance me up. But I'm amazed to find in moments – a fraction of the time it took for the left – the right hand side of my body is adjusted.

"Feldenkrais doesn't work directly on muscles and bones – it addresses the nervous system and retrains the brain. That's why it's so helpful for people with neurological conditions



such as ms, cerebral palsy and stroke," Sabine says.

Feldenkrais is popular with dancers, musicians and performance artists who need flexibility or hold their bodies in certain positions for extended periods of time, thus creating tension. But this 'holding' is not limited to professional performers. Sabine sees more and more people who don't realise the damage they are doing by holding in their stomachs to look good.

"Certain exercise regimes today advocate pulling in your belly but it is one of the main causes of back problems today."

Verdict: Gentle yet very effective. I walk out of the session feeling lighter, taller, more integrated and at ease. Feldenkrais demands you to be in the moment – and once that awareness has been awoken, it stays.

•A 75-minute session with Sabine Volkmann costs €60. For an appointment call 086 6050427.

Feldenkrais treatment

What is it?

THE FACTS

The method is neither a therapy nor a treatment. It is a form of re-educating the body about how to move more intelligently. The Feldenkrais method was developed in the 1940s by Russian physicist, engineer and judo expert Dr Moshe Feldenkrais, who synthesised his knowledge of anatomy, physics and psychology when doctors couldn't fully restore movement to his injured knee. Contrary to the 'no pain, no gain' philosophy, Feldenkrais involves gentle exploratory movements and creating an awareness within to improve flexibility, balance and the functioning of the body.

It encourages us to take responsibility for ourselves

by becoming more conscious of how we move, of the areas where we are more rigid and the habitual patterns we adopt. By creating this awareness, we can change how we choose to use our entire bodies and this has a knock-on effect in all areas of our lives. Feldenkrais can be experienced in a group lesson or a private hands-on treatment. Practitioners must complete a four-year training course of 800 to 1,000 hours.

THE EVIDENCE

Feldenkrais has created a stir among physical therapists and physicians since it was developed. But for Feldenkrais, who died in 1984, there was no distinction between mind and

body, thus the lack of laboratory experiments. Since 1988, an increasing amount of research has been undertaken. Studies have shown a reduction in pain and improvement in function in chronic pain and fibromyalgia patients. Functional performance improvements have been reported by people with MS, cerebral palsy, stroke and stuttering. The University of Melbourne is currently conducting a study on the effect of Feldenkrais on walking and balance.

Dublin-based chiropractor, Dr Sean Wall says: "Any method that safely reduces muscular tension and increases body awareness is worth trying. The conservative approach of Feldenkrais appeals to me."