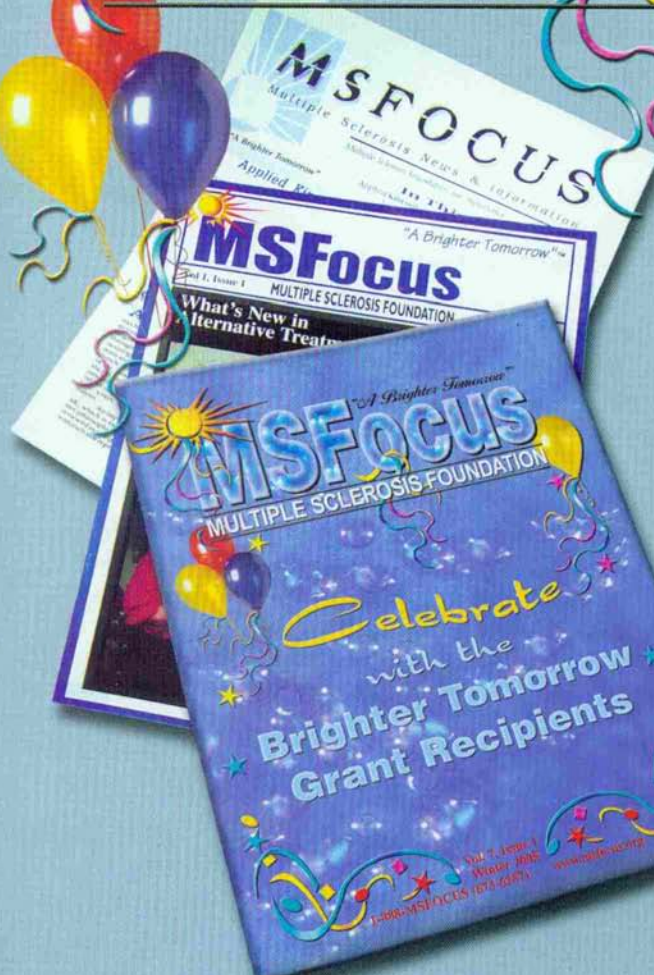




# MSFOCUS

*"A Brighter Tomorrow"*

## MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS FOUNDATION



We've Come  
A Long Way!

# MSF

*Celebrates*

# 20th Anniversary



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**Focus Quote:**

*"Let us not look  
back in anger or forward  
in fear, but around  
in awareness."*

*~ James Thurber*



## Come To Your Senses With



Actor William Hurt with Jane Kosminsky, certified Alexander teacher at the Julliard School in New York City

Would you like to improve the way you function, the way you move, the way you look, and the way you feel? Would you like to experience the physical sensation of lightness and buoyancy? Would you like to rid your body of unnecessary aches and pains, increase the sense of space between your joints, and reduce stress, fatigue, and general anxiety? All of these things are possible with the *Alexander Technique*.

Not to be confused with an exercise program, the Alexander Technique is a gradual learning process, an awareness that you will eventually bring to the activities you perform each day. You will find yourself practicing the Technique while you are walking, having a conversation, sitting in a chair, shampooing your hair, reading, talking on the phone, working on your computer, and waiting in line at the grocery store. But first, you must go back in time . . .

It all began in 1869, when Frederick Matthias Alexander was born in Tasmania, Australia. A naturally curious, independent, and patient boy, his favorite pastime was studying the plays of Shakespeare. As he grew older, he also became intrigued by the art of public speaking. Eventually, he decided to become a Shakespearean actor.

In those days, microphones and other electronic amplification had not yet been invented, so performers had to rely solely on their natural vocal ability. As fate would have it, Alexander began having trouble with his throat, which soon affected his voice. Sometimes, he would gasp audibly during a performance or lose his ability to speak altogether, a condition known as *aphonia*. Numerous doctors and voice trainers recommended that he rest his voice, speaking as little as possible between performances. He followed their advice, but his condition failed to improve, and it seemed his acting career might come to an untimely end. But Alexander was not easily daunted. Ever inquisitive, the young man wondered if it might be something he was *doing* when he spoke that was causing the problem. He asked his doctor, who was receptive to the idea, so Alexander decided to use a mirror to help him see precisely what he was doing while reciting Shakespeare.





# The Alexander Technique

## THE THREE PRINCIPLES: OBSERVATION, INHIBITION & DIRECTION

Much to his surprise, close observation in a mirror revealed that as he spoke, he lifted his chest, arched his spine, tightened his lower back, stiffened his legs, and pushed his toes into the floor, all the while retracting his head, which reduced the efficiency of his voice. *Observation*, the first principal, had revealed to Alexander several detrimental patterns of movement of which he had been unaware. He called these less than optimal habits, which were negatively impacting his ability to speak, “misuse.” Alexander quickly realized that he had stumbled upon a fundamental principle, one that might affect the voice in one person but cause an entirely different ill in another person. Encouraged by the possibility of returning to the stage, Alexander continued his experimental work, patiently undoing his habits of misuse, through a process he called *inhibition*. Then, he focused on releasing the unnecessary tension in his body using *direction*, based upon the *four concepts of good use*. This is the foundation of the Alexander Technique.

## HOW YOU CAN LEARN THE TECHNIQUE

The Alexander Technique is generally taught privately and can be practiced while sitting, standing or lying supine. Comfortable clothing is appropriate, as is taking off your shoes. The Alexander teacher will help the student become aware, both physically and mentally, of

specific patterns of detrimental or unnecessary movement and posture while doing such things as standing, sitting, walking, lifting, and getting in and out of a chair. Lessons are usually 45 minutes to one hour, during which the teacher uses verbal and gentle hands-on guidance to help the student begin to undo these patterns and consciously change them through the concepts of good use. Group lessons, which may be more feasible financially, are often available upon request. While some Alexander teachers discourage self-teaching, videos and books are available that can help you begin your journey into the three principles and the *four concepts of good use*. Private lessons with a qualified instructor may be most advantageous, but the work can also be done alone in the comfort of your own home, using a mirror – just as Alexander did!

## A WORD FROM ALEXANDER TEACHERS

“The Alexander Technique is about learning to undo harmful patterns of tension and compression, allowing for a proper expansion, both in stillness and in motion,” explains Dana Ben-Yehuda, Media Spokesperson for the American Society for the Alexander Technique (AmSAT) and AmSAT Certified Alexander Technique teacher.

“The Alexander Technique is an educational tool, a process – not a quick fix,” adds Jane Kosminsky, a certified Alexander teacher at the Julliard School in New York City. “The more you use it and stay with it, the more it unfolds for you and the more it empowers you.”



"The reality is that true understanding of the Technique comes only with experiencing it, not from reading or talking about it," writes Robert Rickover in *Fitness Without Stress: A Guide to the Alexander Technique*.

## A WORD FROM THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY

"During Alexander's lifetime, several doctors testified to the effects of his technique in journals like *The Lancet*, and, in 1937, 19 doctors urged in a letter in the *British Medical Journal* that the Alexander Technique should be included in medical training," writes Glynn MacDonald in *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Alexander Technique*.

In 1973, when Professor Nikolaas Tinbergen won the Nobel Prize for Medicine, much of his acceptance speech was devoted to the Alexander Technique as he and his family had experienced tremendous benefits from lessons. "From personal experience we can already confirm some of the seemingly fantastic claims made by Alexander and his followers, namely, that many types of underperformance and even ailments, both mental and physical, can be alleviated, sometimes to a surprising extent, by teaching the body musculature to function differently."



## A WORD FROM ALEXANDER STUDENTS

Elementary School Principal Ana Bonilla was diagnosed with relapsing remitting MS in 1999. Always open to alternative therapies for her MS, which manifests with significant fatigue and left-side numbness, she has studied the Alexander Technique for two years. "I attend class once a week for an hour. I am learning to use my body in a different way, to expend less energy and improve my mind-body connection. Now that I am able to sit and stand in a more balanced and easy manner, I move with less effort and am less fatigued. My concentration has improved, too."

Ten years ago, Carole Bellinger-Kawahara, a 56-year-old microbiologist, was diagnosed with myasthenia gravis, an autoimmune disease that symptomatically mimics MS. "I have been surprised at the effects of Alexander training," she says. "My lower back pain started to improve within the first month. After six months, I was pain-free for the first time in years. I rarely see my chiropractor anymore. I was astonished! As I learned to open my body and release some of

*Dana working with Ana, center & left, and Carole, below.*

the constant tension in my muscles, I gained a sense of greater freedom of motion and less tension. That sort of low-level, nagging, residual soreness in my joints went away. Alexander feels to me like something that my body had been hungry for on some very basic level.”

“I would absolutely recommend Alexander to anyone, especially those with chronic illness,” Carole says. “Chronic conditions, in particular, sap

strength from us in many ways and I have found Alexander has helped me cope better. It is an ongoing process, but the postural changes bring better breathing, less physical stress on the organs, and a feeling of increased well-being. Habitual patterns die hard, especially in my case. But I have seen a real difference in my body and the way it feels and I have begun to think that maybe a few things have changed for good!”

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **The Balance of Well-Being**

(VHS: 75 min.)

An Introduction to the Alexander Technique with William Hurt & Jane Kosminsky. This first lesson teaches you how to begin to use the Alexander Technique, by yourself, at home.

### **The Alexander Technique: Solutions for Back Trouble**

(VHS: 75 min.)

With Master Teacher & Physical Therapist Deborah Caplan, learn to keep your back healthy and free from pain by using the Alexander Technique in the activities of everyday life.

### **The Complete Illustrated Guide to Alexander Technique**

By Glynn MacDonald  
Element Books, 1998

### **Fitness Without Stress**

*A Guide to the Alexander Technique*  
By Robert M. Rickover  
Metamorphous Press, 1998  
[www.alexandertechnique.com](http://www.alexandertechnique.com)

A comprehensive guide and website that address the history of Alexander Technique, how it can help with specific medical conditions, how to find a teacher, and more.

### **American Society for the Alexander Technique (AmSAT)**

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[www.alexandertechnique.org](http://www.alexandertechnique.org)

Contact AmSAT to learn more or to find a teacher in your area.