



freedom in action

Freedom in Action

The Alexander Technique

Media Kit

September 2009

Freedom in Action Media Kit

The Alexander Technique (AT) is a pain and body management technique that is being used by many Australians and pain sufferers world wide.

AT was originally developed in Australia in the late 1800s by actor Frederick M. Alexander as a response to chronic hoarseness and breathing difficulties. The Technique involves recognising and reducing inefficiencies and strain in movement, learning to sit, stand, and move more efficiently. It is a unique and practical method of becoming aware of how we use our minds and bodies.

This media kit aims to highlight the Alexander Technique and how it is used in people's everyday lives. The kit also provides background on Freedom in Action, a Canberra-based Alexander Technique practice and provides in depth detail around three specific issues.

Please find enclosed in this Media kit:

- Freedom in Action Business Backgrounder
- Alexander Technique Backgrounder
- British Medical Journal article

Included in this kit are three media releases that include topic specific information for:

- Media Release #1 – Corporate / workplace angle
- Media Release #2 – Sports angle
- Media Release #3- Women's angle

For more information, articles or interviews, please contact Michael Stenning, Freedom in Action, via the details below

Freedom in Action

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For More information on the Alexander Technique can be found at www.freedominaction.com.au or www.alexandertechnique.com.au



The Alexander Technique – Fact Sheet

What is the Alexander Technique?

The Alexander Technique (AT) was originally developed in Australia in the late 1800s by actor Frederick M. Alexander as a response to chronic hoarseness and breathing difficulties. The Technique involves recognising and reducing inefficiencies and strain in movement, learning to sit, stand, and move more efficiently. It is a unique and practical method of becoming aware of how we use our minds and bodies. Today, certified instructors, who have completed 3-year fulltime training, teach the Technique through hands-on coaching. It is a life-long self help method that improves body use, natural balance, coordination and movement skills, and helps pupils learn to recognise and avoid poor movement habits that may cause and aggravate their pain. AT is low-tech and non-invasive. AT is highly effective in helping to manage, avoid, solve and mitigate musculo-skeletal problems and stress for individuals and organisations. It provides a way of reducing the strains on the body and being, to optimise performance of everyday as well as of special skills.

How does it work?

In an AT lesson, the teacher works with the whole body, including the nervous system, so that the attention of the student is actively engaged. AT is directly concerned with the working of the "postural reflexes", i.e. the processes that enable us to support and balance ourselves against the ever-present pull of gravity while we go about our daily activities. Over the years most of us build tensions and distortions into our habitual way of being, which slip below the level of our conscious awareness. These produce ongoing restrictions to the working of our natural postural reflexes.

The role of the Alexander teacher is to use gentle manual guidance to help unravel distortions and encourage the natural reflexes to work again. The teacher uses verbal instruction to help students become aware of their own pattern of interference and how to deal with it for themselves. Hence the work can be described as educative.

Who can benefit?

People who suffer from:

- Back or neck pain
- Overuse syndrome
- Other musculo-skeletal problems eg scoliosis, disc degeneration
- Poor posture and inappropriate muscular tension or performance anxiety

People who exercise, play sport or a musical instrument can gain greater freedom and poise, with benefits to technique, fitness and resistance to injury.

Is it for me?

AT helps people to organise body awareness in a way that is useful to themselves. It provides them with the knowledge they need in order to implement their good intentions. AT has been helping people with a range of chronic and "intractable" problems since 1894. Research carried out over the last 50 years in the U.S.A., Great Britain, Denmark and Australia has confirmed subjective and empirical evidence that AT helps to reduce effort in movement, improve breathing efficiency and improve posture. It is a widely-used method, providing:

- control, reduction, elimination of pain
- self-directed long-term approach to musculo-skeletal problems
- movement therapy/re-education addressing posture, breathing
- unique assessment of current movement patterns, and a unique, tailored program
- improvement that becomes part of everyday life
- a foundation for all fitness and therapeutic activities

How do I start?

Pupils undertake an individually tailored course of one-to-one tuition. The first step is normally to arrange an initial lesson or class. This gives the pupil a first-hand idea of what AT is about, how it is taught, and what they might get out of having lessons. To learn skills of lasting value requires several lessons. Pupils with long-standing or severe problems usually need more lessons. A wide range of health funds offer rebates on lesson fees. Contact Freedom in Action to arrange an initial lesson.

More information can be found at www.alexandertechnique.com.au

Contact us

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Freedom in Action – Business Background

What is Freedom in Action?

Freedom in Action (FIA) is a Canberra based company specialising in the teaching of the Alexander Technique, a gentle and non-invasive approach to functional improvement, which is taught as a skill for life. Established by Michael Stenning and Léonie John, FIA has helped thousands of people to overcome, mitigate and manage a range of common, and not so common back, neck and associated problems through one on one lessons for individuals, and the *Fit for Work – Fit for Life!* training workshops for corporate clients.

The history

Michael Stenning and Léonie John have, between them, over forty years full time experience teaching the Alexander Technique. They first visited Canberra in November 1985 and gave lessons and workshops at the then Reid TAFE. In January 1986, they moved to Canberra and started teaching full-time in Griffith. Since then FIA has given countless lessons, talks and workshops and developed various specifically targeted programs including early intervention to manage and prevent workplace injury. Other programs included a pilot with young elite athletes for the ACT Academy of Sport, work with horse riders, and many instrumentalists and singers. Michael Stenning has worked in OHS/Rehabilitation/Human Potential/Training for 20 years and incorporates a sophisticated and well tested approach to posture, ergonomics, breathing, balance, relaxation, rehabilitation, occupational health and pain prevention and management.

Major achievements

In its 23 year history, FIA has assisted over 4000 people to improve their quality of life through tens of thousands of Alexander Technique lessons, workshops, training sessions and other presentations. Many high profile musicians, academics and sportspeople have been assisted by FIA. Michael and Leonie are qualified members of the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (STAT) and its Australian affiliate, AuSTAT. They have established The Back School in the ACT and are Comcare-registered providers of rehabilitation services. FIA has developed and delivered performance programs for musicians, athletes and computer-based workers through both the one on one lessons for individuals and the *Fit for Work – Fit for Life!* training workshops for corporate clients. FIA has also designed a range of hugely successful ergonomic office chairs.

One on one lessons

FIA offers one to one attention to individuals wanting a solution to back problems, neck pain, aches, stress and tension. A first lesson is an opportunity for individuals to get first-hand experience of the Alexander Technique. Participants may be asked to perform common movements like sitting or walking. Verbal feedback and instruction, and use of the instructor's hands, are given to guide the participant to an awareness of physical tensions, holding patterns or distortions. Pupils find the process pleasant, calming and relaxing as well as informative. It is gentle and non-invasive. On-going lessons follow a broadly similar pattern – if the pupil is diligent in working on themselves between lessons, then functional improvement, improvements in ease of movement, breathing, poise and self awareness and control should inevitably follow. One-on-one lessons can take place at the workplace/gym etc to help ensure that principles are being put into practice. Initial lessons are approximately one hour for \$125. Ongoing lessons are 35 – 40 minutes and are \$75, or \$70 for students or if a package of lessons is booked.

Fit for Work – Fit for Life!

FIA developed the *Fit for Work – Fit for Life!* training workshops to assist businesses and organisations whose staff suffer from back problems, neck pain, overuse injuries, aches and pains, stress and tension. The workshops aim to help staff to help themselves by providing participants with effective tools which they can use to reduce the incidence and risk of injury, deal with stress and self-manage into the future. Participants learn the basic principles of good body use, how to stay comfortable in their body and minimise wear and tear, and practical techniques for optimising performance. The program can assist businesses by lowering the costs and time associated with treatments, lengthy recruiting, training new staff, absenteeism and low staff morale. Prices for workshops vary depending on length and numbers.

Designing ergonomic office chairs

FIA has developed and produced a range of ergonomic office chairs, the *Stenning ActiveBalance* chair, to aid people to sit without strain. The ActiveBalance chair can help prevent overuse injuries, back problems, other problems associated with long sitting and computer use and assist in rehabilitation for those who have injuries. It is simple, elegant and effective and designed to make it easy to remain comfortable and productive at a desk. It comes highly recommended by GPs, Osteopaths and Physiotherapists.

Contact us

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Media Release

Alexander Technique training reduces costs to Australian businesses by making staff fit for work

Training in the Alexander Technique, a low-tech, non invasive approach to managing musculo-skeletal problems and stress, is helping organisations reduce the corporate costs of workplace injury.

“Amidst the global economic crisis, Australian employers are looking for ways to improve staff performance and retention, and reduce absenteeism,” said Michael Stenning, Canberra based Alexander Technique teacher and founder of the *Fit for Work – Fit for Life!* training workshops for corporate clients.

“Training in the Alexander Technique has helped provide a bottom line pay-off for organisations in terms of staff health, productivity and morale. It has helped organisations to reduce costs associated with stress and injury in the workplace,” continued Mr Stenning.

Studies have shown that low back pain is one of the most common conditions managed in primary health care and costs the economy billions of dollars annually. In the year 2000 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare produced a report *Australia's health 2000: the seventh biennial health report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, which found that ‘low back pain is the most prevalent and costly musculoskeletal condition in Australia’. Further studies found that it is also the most common health condition causing older Australians to be absent from the labour force.

Comcare’s 2003 annual report stated that musculoskeletal injuries represented 64.6% of federal government employee workers compensation claims. It was with all of this in mind that Michael began a program of training workshops, *Fit for Work – Fit for Life!*, teaching the Alexander Technique to corporate clients.

“Much workplace injury is preventable. Back pain, neck pain and Occupational Overuse Syndrome (RSI) all involve poor body use in daily activity. People are unaware of their movement habits and can misuse even the best ergonomic furniture, and misinterpret the best ergonomic advice.

“The *Fit for Work – Fit for Life!* program gives organisations the means to provide staff with preventive tools to help them help themselves, to maintain their wellbeing and to enhance productivity,” said Mr Stenning.

The program teaches principles of the Alexander Technique, a life-long self help method that aims to improve body use, natural balance, coordination and movement skills, and to instruct pupils in how to recognise and avoid poor movement habits that cause and aggravate their pain.



“Corporations should consider how high the costs of workplace injury really are for their business. Treatments, lengthy rehabilitation, recruiting and training of new staff, absenteeism of key staff and low morale can all effect the running of a business.

“Fit for Work – Fit for Life! teaches staff effective strategies for dealing with stress and staying relaxed, the basic principles of good body use, how to stay comfortable in their body and minimise wear and tear, and practical techniques for optimising performance and avoiding injury,” said Mr Stenning.

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For more information, images or to arrange an interview, please contact Michael Stenning
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Alexander Technique helps sportspeople reach peak performance

Training in the Alexander Technique, a low-tech, non-invasive approach to managing musculo-skeletal problems and stress, is helping athletes and people participating in various sports, to reach their peak performance.

“Training in the Alexander Technique is being increasingly adopted by competitive and recreational sports people. Athletes involved in sports as diverse as long distance running, equestrian, swimming, cross-country skiing and hammer throwing recognise the benefits that come with training in the technique,” said Michael Stenning, Canberra based Alexander Technique teacher, who has assisted many sportspeople in the past.

“Many well known sportspeople – including British Olympic marathon runners, rowers, hammer thrower Howard Paine, Australian Olympic equestrian Mary Hannah and multi-disciplinarian Daley Thomson - have used the Alexander Technique to improve some aspect of the way that they function including breathing, freedom or efficiency in movement, balance, dealing with stress, aches and pains or injuries,” he said.

The Alexander Technique was originally developed in Australia in the late 1800s by actor Frederick M. Alexander as a response to chronic hoarseness and breathing difficulties. The Technique involves recognising and reducing inefficiencies and strain in movement, learning to sit, stand, and move more efficiently.

Today, certified instructors teach the Technique through hands-on coaching. It is a life-long self help method that improves body use, natural balance, coordination and movement skills, and helps pupils learn to recognise and avoid poor movement habits that may cause and aggravate their pain. It provides a way of reducing the strains on the body and being, to optimise performance of everyday as well as of special skills.

“This is why the Technique is particularly good for helping athletes to reach their peak performance. It assists sportspeople in three ways – by improving their general fitness, technique and educating them in the avoidance of or recovery from injury,” said Mr Stenning.

“Most people develop a habitual way of being which slips below the level of conscious awareness. Unconscious restrictions render movement more effortful and less efficient than necessary and can predispose us to injury. For athletes, failing to notice that they are tensing their shoulders or holding their breath can make distances seem greater, or that they have insufficient time to act or react.

“Alexander Technique enhances sportspeople’s awareness of their inner environment and teaches greater control of the mechanisms of balance and coordination which helps enormously with sports performance,” he continued.



In the 23 years since Michael Stenning established his Canberra based business, *Freedom in Action*, which provides training in the Alexander Technique in the form of both one on one lessons for individuals and the *Fit for Work – Fit for Life!* training workshops for corporate clients, he and partner Léonie John have helped thousands of people to overcome, mitigate and manage a range of common, and not so common, back, neck and associated problems. Clients have included sportspeople from wide ranging sports and physical activities. Michael notes the particular way in which training in the technique has helped his clients who are skiers.

“For skiers, the Technique improves balance and coordination. Experienced skiers gain from this approach, their initial learning may have taken place in a tense manner and this tension has become a fixed part of their skiing technique, limiting further improvement. Many discover that not trying so hard can mean not only learning more easily, but actually skiing better and with less effort,” he said.

Australian World Cup and Shadow Olympic team member, Ben Sim, sees the benefits of the technique. Ben is Australia’s top ranked distance skier and has been having weekly lessons in the Alexander Technique with Michael.

“When you are racing over distances of up to 50 kilometres, you have to be efficient,” said Mr Sim. “Since having lessons in the Alexander Technique I feel lighter on my skis and winning the 2009 International Kangaroo Hoppet, a marathon length cross country ski race, suggests I am actually skiing faster,” he said.

And it seems the dance world is praising the benefits of the Alexander Technique. In an article by Jen Peters published in May this year, US Dance Magazine reported, ‘Correcting imbalances that can aid injury recovery and even prevent injury is only part of Alexander’s benefits. Many dancers find increased skill and dexterity, and even emotive focus. The secret lies not in forcing action, but in making the impulse behind every action conscious.’

Mr Stenning says the technique can assist all kinds of sportspeople, “It is not just the elite who can learn to optimise their way of working with themselves to gain that competitive edge. Sports people who have trouble improving beyond a certain level can also gain,” he said.

Sportspeople interested in finding out more can contact *Freedom in Action* on (02) 6249 8582 or visit www.freedominaction.com.au More information on the Alexander Technique can be found at www.alexandertechnique.com.au

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Media Release

Alexander Technique - improving women's bodies and minds

Training in the Alexander Technique, a low-tech, non-invasive approach to managing musculo-skeletal problems and stress, is helping Australian women become more aware of how they use their bodies and minds.

“Training in the Alexander Technique is being increasingly adopted by women of all ages. It is a unique and practical method that women can use to become more aware of how they use their minds and bodies,” said Michael Stenning, Canberra-based Alexander Technique teacher, who has assisted many women in the past.

The Alexander Technique was originally developed in Australia in the late 1800s by actor Frederick M. Alexander as a response to chronic hoarseness and breathing difficulties. The Technique involves recognising and reducing inefficiencies and strain in movement, learning to sit, stand, and move more efficiently.

Today, certified instructors teach the Technique through hands-on coaching. It is a life-long self help method that improves body use, natural balance, coordination and movement skills, and helps pupils learn to recognise and avoid poor movement habits that may cause and aggravate their pain. It provides a way of reducing the strains on the body and being to optimise performance of everyday as well as of special skills. The Technique is suitable for everyone, both genders and all ages, but Michael explains some of the benefits specifically for women.

“We have worked with many women over the years to help them to recognise the tension patterns they hold in everyday activities including desk-based office duties, managing children and working in the kitchen,” he said.

“The Alexander Technique works with the postural reflexes, that is, the processes that enable us to support and balance ourselves against the ever-present pull of gravity while we go about our daily duties. Alexander teachers use gentle manual guidance to help women unravel distortions and encourage the natural reflexes to work again.

“Women who suffer from back or neck pain, overuse syndrome (RSI), other musculo-skeletal problems such as scoliosis and disc degeneration, or poor posture and inappropriate muscular tension can all benefit from learning the technique,” Mr Stenning continued.

The Technique has also been successfully used by women who play sport - Australian equestrian Olympian, Mary Hannah recognises the benefits of training in the technique -



and is particularly effective for dancers, musicians and actors. It is of huge benefit to women in the everyday workforce. **freedom in action**

41 year old Joyce T., a Teacher's Aid from Canberra knows all too well the benefits of learning the technique. Following a shoulder injury at work, Joyce had physio and massage and whilst experiencing improvement from these treatments, the improvement plateaued and she was left with constant pain in her right arm, shoulder and neck. Her GP suggested Alexander lessons to improve her posture to lessen strain on injured soft tissue, to relieve pain and prevent a recurrence of symptoms.

"From the first lesson I recognised a pattern in neck tension I was holding in many of my every day activities. Bringing it under control brought immediate relief to my neck pain. My back started to feel much better, and rather than accumulating aches and knots over the week, I was finishing my week feeling fine," said Joyce.

"The lessons showed me how to influence and prevent misuse in my neck and back. I now experience very little pain, and know how to steer myself to get out of pain when it does arise," she continued.

Joyce's experience was supported by a multicentre clinical trial in the UK. Costing nearly \$2 million and funded by the Medical Research Council and the NHS Research and Development Fund, the results were published in a British Medical Journal article in 2008, and showed that Alexander Technique lessons give long-term relief to chronic low back pain sufferers.

According to the British Medical Journal article, 'the research showed that following 24 Alexander Technique lessons, the number of days in pain had reduced from an average of 21 a month, to just 3 days per month. At the same time, function and quality of life measures had increased significantly.'

There is also evidence to suggest the technique can be helpful to pregnant women, and during childbirth itself. Ilana Machover, a childbirth educator and qualified teacher of the Alexander Technique in London, has published articles on the subject. In her book *The Alexander Technique and Natural Childbirth*, she says 'the Alexander Technique can be of enormous help (in labour). We can teach the woman how to cope with labour pain rather than wishing to eliminate it.'

Michael Stenning, together with his partner Léonie John, has a 23 year history of assisting women to improve their quality of life through tens of thousands of Alexander Technique lessons. His Canberra company, *Freedom in Action*, offers women one on one lessons, and training workshops for corporate clients through the *Fit for Work – Fit for Life!* program.

Women interested in finding out more can contact *Freedom in Action* on (02) 6249 8582 or visit www.freedominaction.com.au More information on the Alexander Technique can be found at www.alexandertechnique.com.au

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