



# The Magic of Somatics

**Improve Your Mind-Body Connection**

**Take Back Your Body,  
Develop Free and Easy Movement  
and Look Better Than You Have In Years**

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How can you tell an "older" person at a distance?  
It's by how they stand and move, isn't it?

**W**ould you like to have the physical prowess you had when you were years younger? Would you like people to see it in how you stand and move?

Did you know that the loss of physical prowess - the physical pains of aging and injury, back trouble, bursitis, and morning stiffness - come largely from tension habits developed over a lifetime? Did you know that years of chronic tension can be erased by improving the mind-body connection? Did you know that you can regain the freedom and grace you had when you were years younger and continue to *improve* as you get older?

**The Magic of Somatics** comes from a breakthrough in mind-body integration.

In **The Magic of Somatics**, Lawrence Gold, a certified somatic educator, guides you from pain and limitation to comfort and freedom through physical-*attentional* exercises that restore the freedom and strength of your younger years.

**The Magic of Somatics** consists of eleven guided lessons in the somatic transformational exercises. With them, you can get relief from such common conditions as chronic back trouble, headaches, stress, sciatica, neck pain, and other conditions. The days of guarding a bad back can be over.

Do the exercises in **The Magic of Somatics** and get the surprise of your life. Regain the physical prowess you had when you were younger.

... from Session 1

**P**eople have one universal response to injury: we tighten up. We protect our injury. Another name for this is guarding. We have the same response to other stressful situations. We tighten up and protect ourselves.

To continue self-protection longer than necessary leads to tension habits, which in turn lead to chronic muscular fatigue, pain, stiffness, pinched nerves, joint damage, and other ills. Our self-protection becomes the source of our ills. It is not the passage of time, but the accumulated effects of injury, that cause many of the signs of aging.

The somatic transformations are a basic breakthrough in reversing the effects of aging on physical comfort and freedom of movement. They provide a way to discover and release obsolete tension habits, regardless of how old they are and regardless of how long we have been in pain. With somatic transformations, you can erase chronic pains that have persisted for years, as if by magic. You can regain the freedom of movement you had when you were younger.

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## *Beyond Stretching – The Whole Body yawn*

Concerns with stretching muscles point to one key observation: muscles get shortened.

The key question is, "Why?"

Your muscles are controlled by your nervous system. Your muscles have no control of their own. The obvious conclusion to draw is that your muscles get shortened because your nervous system is stimulating them to contract.

Athletes and dancers attempt to stretch their hamstrings to avoid injury. "Attempt" is the correct word because stretching produces only limited and temporary effects, which is one reason why so many athletes (and dancers) suffer pulled hamstrings and knee problems.

As anyone who has had someone stretch their hamstrings for them knows, forcible stretching is usually a painful ordeal. In addition, stretching the hamstrings disrupts their natural coordination with the muscles of the fronts of the thighs, which is why our legs feel shaky after stretching the hamstrings. The same is true of stretching any other muscle. More than that, because muscular tension is maintained as a postural habit (by which we maintain our sense of "normal" tension and posture), forceful stretching does nothing to change that habit; like "going on a diet", we soon rebound to the way we were, or worse. If we stretch ourselves by pitting one muscle group against another, what often results is an increase in tension in both muscle groups.

Oddly enough, if you try to relax habitually tight muscles by an act of will, you are likely to find that you can't relax past a certain point, even with special breathing, visualization, or other techniques.

At that point, you may assume that those muscles are completely relaxed and need stretching. You may not realize that you are contracting "on automatic" due to postural habits stored in your nervous system. Any attempt to stretch them simply re-triggers the impulse to re-contract them to restore the sense of what is "familiar". That is why hamstrings (and other muscles) tighten up again so soon after stretching or massage.

Fortunately, there is a more effective way to manage muscular tension than by stretching. To understand how it works, let's start with the recognition that muscles that need stretching are actually contracting.

What is necessary, then, is to shift your familiar "tension set point" – your sense of what "relaxed" is – from habitually tense to habitually relaxed. That way, you contract only when you intend to do so.

**To change your set-point requires more than stretching or massaging; it requires you to learn – or relearn – how to relax and what that feels like.**

### *The Whole Body Yawn*

Yawning is relaxing -- but it's not an attempt to relax.

Next time you yawn, notice what's happening. You're not relaxing the muscles of your mouth and neck; you're tightening them! It's *afterward* that you experience relaxation.

This is an important clue. You are experiencing a basic way we operate. To relax, we must be reminded of the difference between tension and relaxation. We must *feel* the difference. Yawning does that.

This process of tension/relaxation can be applied systematically to the whole body. The movement maneuvers given in this program do exactly that. They involve very much the same quality of tension and relaxation as yawning does – and they produce a similar result: relaxation, greater freedom of movement, and recovery of our energy from wasteful habitual tension.

Doing movements with feeling in slow motion is the key to somatic transformation.

Significant results come relatively quickly from doing the somatic transformations. Make the transformations part of your daily regimen, and soon strength and freedom of movement become second nature. You enjoy assurance of your fitness for physical activity of all kinds.

## Basic Somatic Transformation for Freeing Hamstrings

(from Thomas Hanna)

**THE ESSENCE OF THIS MOVEMENT:** balanced counter-tension between your working leg and your arms and smooth movement



**STARTING POSITION:** sitting on the floor with one leg bent and dropped to the side.

Draw the knee of your straight leg up enough to permit you to grasp your foot from the sides with both hands; your finger tips meet at your sole, at the ball of your foot. Get a firm grip, and you are ready to begin. Work patiently *within your comfort zone*.



1. Holding your foot firmly, *gently* push with your leg, so that your arm and shoulder stretch long. Hang your head forward. Work gently to the edge of your flexibility.

⇒ *TRY THIS!* ⇒ Bend your other knee as you push.

⇒ *TRY THIS!* ⇒ Point the toes of the “pushing” leg.

2. Now, gradually relax your push, let your knee bend, and take up the slack by drawing your leg up with your hands. Tip your head ‘way back.

*It's a kind of moving isometric exercise.*

⇒ *TRY THIS!* ⇒ Lock the other knee straight.

⇒ *TRY THIS!* ⇒ Lift the toes of the other leg to help lock the knee.

⇒ *TRY THIS!* ⇒ Tighten your bent-knee/hamstrings to tuck your foot tighter toward your buttock.



3. Now, relax, then push and straighten the leg you’re holding, resisting by pulling backward with your hands.

*Resistance makes you feel more clearly. You'll notice that with each repetition, you get a little further. You're gaining feeling and control of the muscular tension in*



*your hamstrings. Remember to move slowly enough and just strongly enough to feel the muscle-action clearly.*

⇒ *TRY THIS!* ⇒ Bow your head forward as you straighten your leg.



⇒ *TRY THIS!* ⇒ Bend the other knee.

4. Wrap your hands around the sides of your bent-knee leg and rub from hip to foot and back, again, as if you were pushing down and pulling up a long stocking - five times or so.

**After about ten *slow motion* repetitions, stand up and feel the difference between your two legs. Walk. Notice the difference in how your legs feel.**

**Now, do your other leg.**

**VARIATIONS: (Each position increases awareness and control.)**

- on your back
- on your sides

**Finish this section by doing the exercise in Section 10, page 72, *Freeing Your Hands, Wrists and Forearms*.**

## Session 6

### *The Saunter, the Swagger, and the Refrigerator Walk*

“One of the most ancient and famous of riddles is that of the Sphinx: ‘What is it that has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?’ In Greek mythology, Oedipus provided the correct answer: the human being, who crawls on all fours in infancy, walks on two legs in adulthood, and leans on a cane in old age.” (Thomas Hanna, Somatics)

If we look more deeply within that answer, we find that more can be said, for there are a few basic ways of walking that can be observed among human beings. I call them the saunter, the swagger, and the refrigerator walk.

The saunter is the easy-going swing of walking. The dancer, Fred Astaire, exemplified the easy saunter. The female version can be seen in the hip-swinging movements of Marilyn Monroe.

The swagger is an exaggerated and demonstrative attitude demonstrated by tough guys. There’s a lot of side-to-side swaying in that walking – sign of tight waist muscles. Another dancer, actor Jimmy Cagney, who played many gangster roles, exemplified the swagger.

And then, there’s the “refrigerator walk”. Ever seen anybody move a refrigerator? First, they up-end it; then, they “walk” it by tipping it from one side to the other. This is the typical movement pattern of the elderly who have become so tight that their arms barely swing when they walk. Their whole body turns with each step. Actor Robert Mitchum showed the beginnings of this way of walking; his arms swung, while the rest of his torso barely moved, giving him a top-heavy look.

The tighter the walk, the tighter the legs. The freer the walk, the more “reach” there is in the legs, with each step. You’ll notice this for yourself.