

The Feldenkrais Method®

in the management of Chronic Pain

What is Chronic Pain?

The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) defines pain as “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage”. Acute pain is usually short-term pain caused by recent injury or trauma, with healing of the tissues and resolution occurring within 3 months. When acute pain does not resolve within 3 months, it is classified as Chronic Pain.

What is the Feldenkrais Method?

The Feldenkrais Method uses exploratory learning to help clients improve functional activity. It is practiced by thousands of registered Feldenkrais Practitioners across the world. Useful websites for more information: www.feldenkrais.org.au, www.feldenkrais-method.org or www.feldenkrais.com

How does the Feldenkrais Method help people with Chronic Pain?

- Increased understanding of oneself, including how pain is affecting one’s life
- Improved ease of movement and comfort in performing functional activities
- Clients learn new ways of moving to allow increased options for a fuller life

What types of strategies do Feldenkrais practitioners use?

1. Posture and Movement Re-Education

People in chronic pain have altered movement patterns and postures, which are reinforcing their condition. Once these patterns have been brought to the client’s attention, the aim is to normalize these functions.

It is necessary with this population to use very small pain free movements so as to not create a threat to the nervous system. We use different positions / combinations of movements to provide a person with a number of different alternative actions to enhance the movement repertoire. This allows a variety of ways of performing tasks, thus sharing the workload over many muscles and body parts. Therefore a person has a choice of how to move in different combinations and situations.

We understand that in chronic pain where movement patterns are altered, the result is usually a changed balance of work within the muscles throughout the body. That is to say, that some muscle groups are switched on continuously and other muscle groups are inhibited from working. Feldenkrais movement re-education focuses on using the whole body in an organized way i.e. using skeletal connections to create a stable base on which to move from, whilst using the smaller muscles for small discriminatory movements.

Learning is based on repetition, so the client is given tasks to practice independently, to reinforce their learning outside of the clinical setting. Clients can also borrow/purchase Feldenkrais Movement lesson CDs. Self practice and discovery not only reinforces learning, but also enhances a person’s locus of control.

2. Clients are taught to pay attention to how they move and learn to sense their bodies more fully.

One of the basic tenets of the Feldenkrais Method is to create awareness of how one is using one's self. Clients are taught to increase their attention in many ways, such as:

- Attending to their level of comfort/ discomfort (and then finding ways to remain within their comfort zone).
- Attending to their postural patterns when sitting, standing, sleeping position, sitting in a car whilst driving and so on.
- Attending to movement patterns when walking, reaching, breathing, performing activities of daily living.

3. Education

Education is given to clients regarding the neurophysiology of pain. Clients are also provided with self-care tools that are individually tailored to their signs and symptoms. It is important to show clients how to integrate the lessons learnt in a clinical setting to social/ home/ work situations. In this way the clients learn to become their own therapist. Clients are taught to be able to deal with flare-ups effectively, and to learn to pace themselves in tasks at home/work, or when out socially.

4. There are two modalities for working with clients

Practitioners can work one to one with clients using gentle hands-on movements and touch (Functional Integration ®) or in a group setting where clients are directed through movement sequences (Awareness Through Movement®).

5. Teamwork

Feldenkrais practitioners work in a variety of settings e.g. hospitals, health clinics, and also as sole practitioners. We are very aware that the treatment of people in chronic pain demands a team approach. Feldenkrais Practitioners will communicate with other health professionals involved with their clients, to notify them if any problems arise, and to ensure that the team is working towards similar goals.

Has there been any research into the Feldenkrais Method?

Evidence for the effectiveness of the Feldenkrais Method is increasing as more research is performed. Visit International Feldenkrais Federation www.feldenkrais-method.org/en/biblio and Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc www.feldenkrais.org.au/literature/category/research

A comprehensive document titled *The Feldenkrais Method in the management of Chronic Pain* is available at <http://www.feldenkrais.org.au/literature/2011/06/national-pain-summit-afg-submission>

For more information or if you are looking for a Feldenkrais practitioner in your area telephone FREECALL 1800 001 550 or visit www.feldenkrais.org.au