

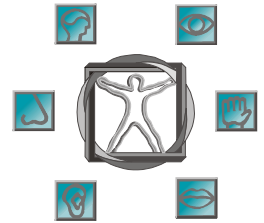
Feldenkrais- Ausbildung

— BEWEGLICHKEIT FÜR GEIST UND KÖRPER —

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Aging Elegantly

Mark Reese, Ph.D., Certified Feldenkrais® Trainer, was one of the world's foremost authorities on the Feldenkrais Method®. Adding to a broad, interdisciplinary background including philosophy, biology, theater, and music, Mark earned his Master's and Ph.D. in Psychology. He was a graduate from the first U.S. Feldenkrais® training program and studied with Moshé Feldenkrais from 1975 - 1984 in San Francisco, Amherst and Tel-Aviv.

Mark has trained practitioners in more than 30 Feldenkrais® Professional Training Programs in such locations as San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, New York, Sidney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Rome, Milan, Munich, and Toronto. He has also given advanced training workshops for practitioners throughout the world and has taught at both the Esalen and Omega Institutes. Mark has published extensively on the Feldenkrais Method® and related health issues, and was co-author of Relaxercise: The Easy New Way to Health and Fitness. He has also appeared often television and radio.

Unfortunately Mark passed away in May 2006.

Old age...begins with the self-imposed restrictions on forming new body patterns. First, one selects attitudes and postures to fit an assumed dignity and so rejects certain actions, such as sitting on the floor or jumping, which then soon become impossible to perform. The resumption and reintegration of even these simple actions has a marked rejuvenating effect not only on the mechanics of the body, but on the personality as a whole."

Moshe Feldenkrais (from *Body and Mature Behavior*, 1949)

While growing older is inevitable, many of the negative attributes we attach to aging are not. It is a source of wonder, however, why some people maintain their youthfulness and vitality, and while others become old prematurely. What can we learn from observing those who have seemingly tapped the "fountain of youth"?

I spent many years with Moshe Feldenkrais when he was in his seventies. I was deeply impressed by how knowledgeable he was about current politics, scientific advances and cultural changes. He was a man of the present, not the past. Feldenkrais was remarkably active and productive, performing judo throws, writing books and traveling the world until he was nearly eighty.

Many masters in the performing arts can also provide inspiration, as well as lessons in how to maintain our own health and vitality. Cellist Pablo Casals, pianist Arthur Rubenstein and conductors Bruno Walter and George Ormandy were musicians who performed at a high level well into their eighties.

Despite whatever genetic and health factors are beyond our knowledge and control, there is much we can do for ourselves to create enduring vitality and well-being. The most common advice is to stay active, and for good reason. People like Feldenkrais and Casals never retired, never stopped working at what they loved the most. It is important to be both mentally and physically active -- to keep moving. As the saying goes, "Use it or lose it."

There is ample evidence that restricting the usage of joints results in structural changes in the joints, muscles and other soft tissues, which will eventually limit full range of motion. Restricted movement thus creates a vicious cycle that further restricts movement. Those individuals who use their bodies fully are far more likely to retain capabilities for their entire lives.

If we look at someone walking in the distance, how do we guess their age? By their posture and gait. When a person's gait is lively, confident and agile it gives the impression of youth. If their gait is slow, stiff or uncertain it connotes age.

However, a recent research study about differences in gait patterns between people aged 30 to 75 is instructive. Contrary to the expectations of some, there were no age-related differences in the gait of various age groups, if factors of disease and injury were ruled out. Healthy individuals walk essentially the same way at age 35 and age 75. It has been our experience that by using Feldenkrais movement re-training for individuals in their 60's, 70's and 80's, it is usually possible to restore a more youthful gait, even with individuals who have a history of problems.

Posture also affects perceptions about age. A more erect, balanced posture connotes youth; a more stooped and crooked posture is associated with age. By remaining active and cultivating good habits of body usage, we can maintain a youthful posture and gait as long as health allows. As with gait, Feldenkrais work is effective for improving the posture of anyone, including the elderly.

The main issue, of course, is not about looking young, although in our culture, how we look strongly influences how others treat us. The main point is that youthful bearing, gait and movement help us to feel young, think young, and act young, while also enjoying the experience, knowledge and wisdom that comes with long years.

The reason Feldenkrais work can be so useful is that many of the physical limitations that are wrongly attributed to age are the result of lack of use, habits, and self-protective muscle patterns. These habits can change at any age through a gradual process of retraining basic movements. Balance, flexibility, posture, gait, and fluidity of movement can all be improved.

The essence of the Feldenkrais method is a gentle type of exercise that teaches a great variety of important, basic movements through the retraining of neuro-muscular patterns.

While some forms of activity and exercise may not be appropriate for some older people, Feldenkrais's system of Functional Integration (FI) and Awareness through Movement (ATM) are specifically designed to help people keep mentally and physically flexible at any age. Feldenkrais published a series of audiotaped exercises for senior citizens that can create startling improvements in flexibility, posture and comfort of movement. I recently published another audio-tape series that is also excellent for the elderly.

In twenty years, the Baby Boomer generation will create the largest senior culture in history. We can expect that they will use all of their education and self-awareness to make them the healthiest and most active seniors ever. Will they be doing tai chi and dancing to "Big Chill" music on ocean cruises?

Maybe they are already.