

SOMATIC MOVEMENT CENTER

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF PRACTICING CLINICAL SOMATICS EXERCISES

- 1. Set aside time and space to practice the exercises so that you don't feel rushed or distracted.** You should practice the exercises in a quiet, private space, especially while you are first learning them. If you live with people, ask them to not interrupt you while you are practicing the exercises. Focused attention is very important to the Clinical Somatics learning process.
- 2. Any amount of time is better than nothing.** If you only have five minutes, take the five minutes to focus completely on just one or two exercises. Ideally, you should spend at least twenty to thirty minutes every day doing the exercises. Some days you will have more time than others. Make the most of the time that you have by moving slowly and focusing completely on the movements that you have chosen to practice that day.
- 3. Find space in your home where you can lie on the floor, on a carpet or an exercise mat.** You need to be comfortable, but you also need to be able to get sensory feedback from a fairly firm surface. A bed is too soft, and a bare hardwood floor is too hard. Make sure you can stretch out your arms and legs without restriction.
- 4. Close your eyes and have no background noise while practicing the exercises.** Closing your eyes removes all the visual information that your eyes automatically take in. Keeping your eyes closed allows your brain to focus completely on your internal sensations, making the learning process more effective. Likewise, practicing the exercises in silence removes all of the auditory information that your brain would otherwise have to process.
- 5. Clinical Somatics exercises should be performed as slowly as possible.** The magic of these movements is in the slowness. The slower you move, the more effectively you can retrain your nervous system to release chronic muscle contraction and stand and move in a new way. Since the movements are so slow and gentle, you may not feel like you're doing very much—but when you stand up at the end of your practice, you'll feel the effects of what you've learned.

6. Remember that Clinical Somatics exercises are not stretches. You will be gently contracting and then very slowly releasing your muscles. You should not feel the sensation of pulling in your muscles as you practice them.

7. Clinical Somatics exercises should be relaxing and comfortable, and they should not increase your pain. The movements are very slow and gentle. If you do experience any pain or discomfort, you can make the movement smaller, or you can adjust your position, or you can choose not to do the movement at all.

8. You're in charge! Pay attention to what you're feeling as you practice the exercises, and don't overdo it. Even though Clinical Somatics exercises are extremely slow and gentle, it is possible to do too much.

9. Don't do any intense or vigorous exercise right after practicing Clinical Somatics exercises. If you wish, you can take a slow, gentle walk afterward, and it will help you integrate everything you've just learned. But do not do any intense or vigorous exercise, because it will probably bring you right back into your old muscular habits.

10. Be aware of how other physical activities and therapies may be affecting you. You may want to cut back on or stop practices such as stretching, chiropractic, Rolfing, deep tissue massage, and any other manipulative therapy while practicing Clinical Somatics. These therapies do not retrain the nervous system and can often cause muscles to become tighter, interfering with the Clinical Somatics learning process. Also, any intense workout will likely bring you back into your old muscular habits, undoing the learning you have gained through your Clinical Somatics practice. Slower, less intense workouts can give you the opportunity to integrate what you've learned from your Clinical Somatics exercises.

11. Always approach Clinical Somatics exercises in an exploratory manner. You will learn more effectively and make more progress if you do each movement as if it is the first time you have done it. Take the time to notice what you feel as you do each movement. Notice how it might feel different than it did the day before. If you do several repetitions, notice how each repetition feels different.

12. Enjoy the learning process—the journey—rather than focusing on the end goal. This can be the most difficult aspect of practicing Clinical Somatics. Improving the use of your body with Clinical Somatics is a life-long learning process. Some people feel the improvements that they seek very quickly, and for others it takes a longer time. The more chronic muscular tension you have, the longer it will take you to work through it. The process is much like peeling an onion. You will work through many “layers”—patterns of tension—along the way. You will have good days and bad days. Try to relax and enjoy the process!