

Constructive Rest in Body Mapping by Barbara Conable

Constructive rest ordinarily begins in semi supine position, on your back with your knees bent. There are all kinds of recommendations about how much the knees should be bent and how far apart the feet should rest. I suggest finding that place where the legs balance best, which is generally about where little kids instinctively put their legs when they lie in

The Five Tasks of Constructive Rest

1. Cultivate a whole and integrated body awareness
2. Cultivate the greatest degree of muscular freedom you can have in the moment
3. Cultivate the ease of your breathing
4. Cultivate an accurate, adequate body map
5. Cultivate and renew your relationship with the space you are in and the pacing of time

semi supine position, the feet fairly far apart and the knees not sharply bent, just softly bent.

If you are too injured or tense to be comfortable in any supine position, you should do constructive rest seated

or draped over a therapeutic ball until you are comfortable lying down. If you are pregnant, you will want to consult your doctor about whether semi-supine is appropriate in your circumstance. It will certainly be appropriate in the months after delivery. Some people will need or want to have their heads supported by a book or some other object, though most will not. A cervical pillow can be useful for those who have over straightened their necks and need to correct that habit.

Five Tasks of Constructive Rest

There are five tasks of constructive rest. All the other four depend on the first: the cultivation of a whole and integrated body awareness.

Task ONE: is to cultivate body awareness. For performers of every sort, body awareness is even more felicitous than it is for other folks, because the body awareness one cultivates in constructive rest is the very best condition for practice, rehearsal, and performance.

Most people can build a whole and integrated body awareness best by beginning with the tactile sense, the sense of touch. We have skin all over our bodies loaded with tactile receptors and we have these same receptors interior to our bodies in certain locations, for instance, the nasal passages and the oral cavity. The receptors in the skin give us vital information about temperature, movement of air, pressure, texture, and contact.

In constructive rest you want to bring all your tactile sensation directly into awareness and let it live there. Notice the temperature and movement of the air, your clothing, your contact with the floor, parts of your body touching each other, your glasses, the hair on your neck, your watch and jewelry, any sensations of itching or dryness or damp.

Now, building your whole and integrated body awareness, do not give up your tactile sensation, but go interior to it and find your kinesthetic sensation, which is coming from sense receptors of an entirely different kind in entirely different locations. The kinesthetic receptors are in muscle and connective tissue, concentrated at the joints. These receptors flood your brain with information about your position, that is, the relationship of bone to bone. In constructive rest, you are in semi supine position and you know it, thanks to your kinesthetic receptors. Those receptors will be giving that information to your brain whether you are aware of it or not. In constructive rest, we become aware of our position and of our moving, for instance, the movement of breathing and of all the micro movement, and we become aware of our size. Fortunately, we have sense receptors to tell us about our size. So, let yourself be fully aware of your position, your movement, and your size. You will also be getting information about whether you are tense, whether you are symmetrical or twisted. Kinesthetic experience ranges, as does tactile, from miserable through delicious. If you're uncomfortably tense, just let yourself be aware of it. Awareness is the means to change.

It's important to keep the tactile sensation full as you wake up your kinesthesia. You want to really know what's going on in your body, so you need both senses, whole and integrated.

Next, look to be sure that all your emotion is in awareness, in all its complexity and intensity. Sometimes we seem to feel only one emotion, but most often we are experiencing a rich braid of emotion. One strand may be bigger or brighter, but there will be other strands. Let yourself be aware of all of them. Artists often speak of building "emotional muscle," a very useful metaphor, I think. Rich, complex emotion is for everyone, not just artists.

Now, add to all your tactile, kinesthetic, and emotional awareness anything that falls under the category Other--all the pain, if there is any, all the sensations of pleasure, hunger, thirst, anything. Notice, if you have pain, that you can feel pain and feel all the other sensation as well. This sensing pain in context is the key to recovery from painful injury and it is the key to managing chronic pain, should you be required to. Firmly embed your pain in all your other sensation.

Let yourself truly hear the sounds around you. See what there is to see if your eyes are open. Become aware of smells and any sensation of taste that may be available. Perhaps there is a minty taste in your mouth. If so, let it live there.

It is this living together of all experience in a single gestalt that we call integrated awareness. We want all the discrete bits of information in relationship to each other. It's not that you don't know where each is coming from, but it's not in isolation. Then your attention can shift easily among the items in awareness without your losing the others. Some come into focus as others lie on the periphery of attention, waiting to come into focus as they are needed. You may notice, for instance, some residual anxiety from your workday, but it doesn't absorb your attention. It is comfortably in context of all your other experience.

When you finish any session of constructive rest, you make no effort to keep its benefits. You don't say, for instance, "This is the first time all day my neck has been free, and I'm going to keep it that way." No, that would just introduce some strain. You just get up and go about your business, knowing that your brain will assimilate the experience of constructive rest. No need for strain.

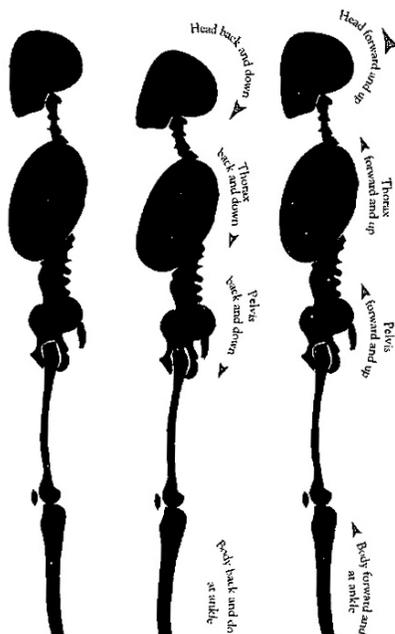
Task TWO: is coming to the greatest degree of muscular freedom you can find in the moment.

Begin with awareness. Find all your tactile sensation, all your kinesthetic sensation, all your emotion, all other sensations and let them live together.

Now, use that awareness to bring yourself to the greatest degree of muscular freedom you can find in the moment. Let yourself register kinesthetically what's going on with regard to tension in your body. Is there muscular tension present? Is it greater in certain parts of your body? Does it form a pattern? Generally people find that they automatically begin to free out of tension as they cultivate awareness because loss of awareness is one of the main causes of tension. It seems the body doesn't like to be abandoned by awareness.

We know from the observations of F. M. Alexander, the founder of the Alexander Technique, that the most common pattern of muscular tension is the one he called downward pull, which begins with tension in the muscles of the neck and spreads inevitably to the rest of the body, compressing the body, reducing its stature. Since we know this pattern is the most common one, we do well to come out of it first in constructive rest. Now, this assumes downward pull is present. If it is not, if your neck is nicely free and not imposing tension on the rest of the body, then just enjoy the freedom and see if there are other patterns of tension you may release.

If you find you have neck tension, just begin to address it. You may use Alexander's "order" to himself, if you like, "I wish my neck to be free." This is a wish in the beginning that over time rises to the status of an intention, so just patiently play with the wish. "I wish my neck to be free."



You may palpate your neck. You may massage your neck, working with your fingertips all along the base of your skull. You may play with movement, nodding, rocking back, turning gently from side to side to see if you can free your neck in the midst of moving it. As you palpate, be sure you explore the cervical curve. Flattening that curve is a source of all kinds of misery, so you want to be sure you're not flattening and you want to be sure you cultivate and appreciate and protect the natural curve of the neck. Use a cervical pillow if it seems to help you.

As you find freedom for your neck, let the rest of

your body take advantage of it. You may have impulses to movement at that point. You may want to bring your arms over your head or across your chest. You may want to spiral your torso, or move your legs one way or another. You may want to bring your knees to your chest or stretch them out into fully supine. Whatever the impulse, just follow it. You will find that movement in response to impulse almost always frees you. It's the body telling you what it wants.

You may find patterns of tension that are peculiar to you. They may come from mismappings, from trauma, from attempts to be shorter or taller. Individual patterns come from all kinds of sources. While it may be important for you to understand and resolve the source of the mismatching or trauma, it may not be in this moment. In any case, you can learn to free out of those patterns. Awareness is the key and intention the means.

When you finish with constructive rest, just get up and go about your business, knowing that the minutes you spent in constructive rest will not be wasted. Your brain will assimilate them and make them your own over time.

Task THREE: work on breathing. Remember that working on breathing is pointless without a body awareness that is complete enough to really let you know what you are doing. Also, we always work on breathing in the context of as much muscular freedom as we can find at the moment, because tension interferes with breathing. You just get as aware and as free as you can and then work with your breathing. Very often, you will continue to free generally as you secure better rib movement and better abdominal wall and pelvic floor movement.

How does breathing feel? Is it limited? It's not uncommon for people to be breathing twenty or more times a minute when they first go into constructive rest. It's not uncommon to be breathing six to eight times per minute at the end. This is because the ribs are free to move through a greater excursion as you release out of tension, so you get more oxygen with each breath. Since the brain decides when to breathe you again based on chemoreceptors that monitor oxygen and carbon dioxide, it will need to breathe you less often if the oxygen levels are not frequently low. Is it better to breathe fewer times per minute? I don't know. I know the larger breaths can feel delicious.

Ask yourself whether your breathing seems coordinated or chaotic. Your breathing should be a long, easy sweep of movement top to bottom in the torso, both on inhalation and on exhalation. People who interfere with the natural coordination may even feel something that feels like a reverse of that natural coordination. They are manipulating the abdominal wall, often without even knowing that they are.

Let your attention turn to your rib movement. Let yourself feel the movement of all twenty-four ribs. Let yourself feel the movement at the costo-vertebral joints and at the cartilage in front. If you don't know about these joints, you will learn about them in this book. Palpate the whole expanse of cartilage along the sternum top to bottom and then on down along the bottom of the ribs at the top of the abdominal wall. Follow the cartilage all around until you bump up against your floating ribs. If you have ever, ever mapped

that region as bone, let yourself appreciate the texture and the movement of the cartilage.

Enjoy the excursion of your ribs up and out on inhalation and then follow the movement down and in on exhalation. Ask yourself whether you are allowing the full excursion down and in. Many singers, for instance, stop short of the full excursion on exhalation. You don't want to be among them. If you really learn to finish a breath in constructive rest, your learning will carry over into singing and speaking, and you will love being able to finish a phrase and a breath at the same time. When you can do this, you will enjoy easy, reflexive inhalations.

Now explore the movement of your abdominal wall in breathing. Remember that we are talking about the abdominal wall front, sides, and back, not just in front. Are you allowing the full movement of the abdominal wall all around in breathing, or is there tension that is interfering? Should there be any tension in the abdominal wall in breathing? No, none, though there will be a lovely dynamic feeling as the muscles spring back on exhalation as pressure from the viscera is reduced.

Constructive rest is an excellent opportunity to explore pelvic floor movement in breathing. You want to be certain there is no interference from tension so that the pelvic floor can be pushed downward on inhalation, and you similarly want no interference from tension on exhalation, so that the pelvic floor can spring back as the pressure comes off. In singing, that rebound feels like wonderful support for the breathing, support in the sense of help or aid.

Task FOUR: promote an accurate, adequate body map. As before, secure your body awareness, find muscular freedom, breathe beautifully, and then work on the integrity of your body map. If your body map is already accurate and adequate to your purposes, you may want to refine it, make it more detailed. If not, simply move on to task five.

Amy addition: This book is going to be going through some of the most common breathing errors flutists have so this is one area where you will likely need to go back and forth from working with your flute to lying on the floor in constructive rest and using your awareness to notice what you actually are doing. This may take some time and patience.

Remember that your mapping errors may be in structure, function, or size. Some people will need to be particularly attentive to one arena. Other people find errors spread across the spectrum and must address them all. You can just start with whatever mapping error is interfering most with your life or the one that is calling attention to itself.

Begin by knowing as clearly as you can what your mapping has been, then continue on to knowing as clearly as you can what the consequences have been. How has the map affected the movement? Then carefully compare your map with the truth. How does the map differ from the truth? Now mentally take on the truth. Let the truth truly register in your brain. Now move, letting the truth of the structure or function or size really determine the movement. Let yourself know how the movement differs as the truth

determines the movement in place of your old inaccurate map. How exactly does it differ? Let the difference really register in your brain.

You will need to repeat this process in constructive rest and elsewhere until the truth is utterly assimilated into your map and there is no residue of the old inaccuracy and the movement it dictated.

Task FIVE: work on one's relationship to space and time. We are talking about a right relationship for constructive rest, but that turns out to be just the same as the right relationship for many situations in life, so you are working on your life right here in constructive rest as you put yourself into genuine relationship with the space around you.

There are THREE basic states of waking sensory awareness. One is introspection, where all or most of your attention is on yourself. A second is extrospection, where all or most of your attention is on what's outside you, on the world around you. A third is inclusive awareness, in which you are aware of yourself and the world. That's the state or condition we want to cultivate in constructive rest.

You might begin your access to space by looking all around you and putting yourself in relationship to everything you see. "Ah, yes, this is where I am," you say, "in this space." You can go on to let your hearing help you by hearing every available sound and putting yourself in relationship to it. You may use your tactile sense to tell you about the space, the temperature and movement of the air, for instance, the nature of the floor, the continuity of the floor. What can your emotions tell you about the space? Let your emotions really live in relationship to the space.

Now, you can claim for your moving--in this case, your breathing and micro movement--any amount of space you choose. It doesn't need to be confined to the room. You can claim the known universe for your moving if you like, or a space the size of a cathedral. Musicians can be in a tiny practice room and still claim an auditorium size space for their moving. This is likewise a key to effective public speaking. In preparing your speech, you claim a space at least as big the one you will be addressing your audience in. Then you are protected from the shock to your nervous system that would come from having to rapidly adjust to a larger space as you move to the podium.

You already live in a space that can hold your audience.

Many people learn as they claim larger spaces for their movement that much of their former tension came from the small, bubble like space they were claiming earlier. The small space was the stimulus to which they responded by tensing muscles.

Now, I want to very clear here about one thing because there is sometimes confusion on this point. I am not talking about imagining a performance space. That would be both difficult and counterproductive in the extreme. You need your imagination for other purposes. I'm talking about claiming in the moment, right here, the same size space you will want to perform in or teach in or lecture in. It's the skill of being in relationship to the space around you. For one thing, an audience will fill that space, and it's your job to

be truly in relationship to your audience. If you are not in relationship to your audience, your audience will feel cheated. It's your business to speak to your audience, not to some abstraction or some entity to which you are refusing attention.

Musicians can use constructive rest to put themselves in a right relationship to time. Time is the stuff of rhythm. Alla Rakha instructed Mickey Hart, "Rhythm is just time, and time can be carved up any you want." Musicians cannot reliably carve up time they do not perceive, and the perception is sensory. Constructive rest is the perfect opportunity to train oneself to perceive time and claim it, just as one must perceive and claim space.

Remember not to introduce any strain into the end of constructive rest. Do not strain to keep your good relationship to space and time. You can always come back to it.