

# THE BIOLOGY OF MOVEMENT:

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In the introduction of his book *Somatics*, Thomas Hanna quotes one of the most ancient riddles in the world—the riddle of the Sphinx. Written by Sophocles in the 5th century it reads:

*What walks on 4 legs in the morning,  
2 legs in the afternoon,  
And 3 legs in the evening?*

Oedipus answers correctly—**human beings**. We crawl in our infancy, walk upright in our middle years and eventually hobble hunched over with a cane in the twilight of our lives. By answering correctly, Oedipus avoids being eaten by the Sphinx, but in his wake he leaves an even greater riddle: why is it that humans, having learned to walk upright, should lose this ability and end up debilitated and infirm? Why should we as enlightened citizens of the 21st century subscribe to an antiquated 5th century medical doctrine? The fact that this process of degeneration does occur in most cases, does not explain why it occurs and it certainly does not prove that it must occur.

The fact is, while we accept that medical advances allow us to live well into our 80's and 90's, we also blindly accept that there is nothing we can do to combat simple stiffness and mobility issues. There was a time not so long ago when our ancestors did not spend their days shackled behind desks or locked behind the wheel of their cars. Anthropologists tell us that we likely spent our days then running to catch our next meal and when we did find it, we had to fight for it. Researchers tell us that this reflex is still hardwired into our basic programming. Our bodies are designed to be physically active. In fact, it's only since the wake of the industrial revolution, that most people have experienced drops in their activity levels.

Frank Booth, Ph.D., professor of biomedical science at the University of Missouri believes that it is precisely this discrepancy between our genes and our modern lifestyle that is responsible for the current rampage of many illnesses. *When we're inactive, these genes misfire and, in some people, it may lead to obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke or cancer.* Movement is the root of health. The old expression “move it, or lose it” has never rang more true. Consider this simple fact. According to Dr. Kevin Short of the Mayo Clinic, our heart loses over 25 percent of its aerobic capacity after just 20 days of bedrest. As the old boxer's expression goes: “to rest is to rust.”

Physiology Hans Seyle was among the first researchers to advocates a relationships between stress, inactivity and physical illness. Seyle believed that when we failed to use our body in certain ways, it suffers from what he termed **Sensory Motor Amnesia**—simply put, our bodies forget how to

move. During the course of our lives, our bodies are continually responding to the daily stresses of different stimuli with a multitude of micro muscular reflexes. Over time, these triggered reflexes can create habitual muscular contraction, which can become so deeply rooted that we literally forget how to relax them. As Marilyn Ferguson wrote, our bodies become “walking autobiographies” of the stresses we have endured throughout the course of our lives. This leads to what Seyle termed the “gradual surrender” --the psychological acceptance that we must deteriorate and the resignation to be imprisoned in stiff and rigid bodies. As Seyle noted however, this process has nothing to do with aging. Children who survive wars or similarly traumatic situations, often grow up to experience much of the same symptoms. We can learn how to undo these reflexes just like they can.

### **Bodily Re-Education:**

The question is, then how do we unlearn these bad habits? This process lies at the heart of Russian Systema’s approach to combat training, beginning with our very perception. As Hans Seyle wrote: *We have the power to influence the rate of wear and tear on our bodies if we have enough will power to act according to the dictates of human intellect.* In fact, the learning process is identical to what we experienced during our infancy, evolving from crawling to walking.

It begins by simply exploring your body. Bodily re-education is an intuitive process. By practicing slow, mindful motions, the mind learns to better feel and in turn use its outer shell. For example, simply by practicing slow, safe and comfortable joint rotations, well within the capacity of each joint, in a painless and stress free pace, the practitioner can supercharge their basic understanding and control of their body. Begin by slowly circling every aspect of your body, from bottom to top, one joint at a time. Circle, clench and spread your toes, rotate your ankles, your knee, your hip. Exercise every aspect of your body with awareness and intention, making every effort to execute the fullest possible rotation and fullest range of comfortable motion. Circle everything, from your jaw and ears to your sternum and abdomen. This simple process will literally re-awaken your bodily awareness and bring energy and nervous sensation to every remote corner of your being. The end result is an instant feeling of greater awareness and bodily unity.

The same type of approach can be used as a floor routine. Simply lie your body down and begin slowly and comfortably arching and rolling your body, stretching like a cat. In all of this work, be sure to never hold your breath, always inhaling through the nose to filter and control the incoming air and exhaling through the mouth to ensure a fuller evacuation of exhausted air. Also, try just slowly rolling on your back, shoulders and spine as a mindful massage. The floor is a fantastic tool for reminding you of your total body.

Russian Systema has a massive variety of truly unique exercises which would be impossible to describe here in the necessary detail. Once you have felt their power even once, you will instantly begin to build building your own

personal fitness program that you will literally carry with you for the rest of your life. Contact us today and find out more about taking a free class to experience the power of our biomechanical exercises first hand.

*The mind's first step to self-awareness must be through the body.*

**George Sheehan**