

Bioenergetics Exercises

Arch/Bow (4 minutes) Spread your legs, turn your toes inward, bend your knees, and arch your back in an attempt to mobilize the lower half of your body. Breathe deeply and fully.

This exercise can help you get more into your legs and feet. For some, it enables the feeling of being closer to the ground. It can have the added effect of getting you to breathe deeper into your abdomen. Just like the roots of a tree, our legs and feet interact energetically with the ground. One can sense the feet becoming charged and alive when one walks barefoot on the wet grass or the hot sand.

The center point of the shoulders is directly above the center point of the feet, and the line joining these points is almost a perfect arch passing through the central point of the hip joint. When a body is in this position, its parts are perfectly balanced. Dynamically, the bow is drawn and ready for action. Energetically the body is charged from feet to head. This means there is a flow of excitation through the body. One feels his feet on the ground and his head in the air, and one also feels fully connected or integrated. Because it is an energetically charged stress position, the legs will begin to vibrate.

Bending Forward (a minute or more) Bend forward and touch the ground lightly with your fingertips. The feet are about twelve inches apart, toes slightly turned in. Starting with bent knees, one straightens them until there is a strain on the hamstring muscles in the back of the legs.

The knees should never be fully extended. The position is held, while the person breathes easily and deeply. If the feeling flows into the legs, they will begin to vibrate. If it gets into the feet, they may start to tingle. Patients who do this exercise sometimes report they feel “rooted” when this happens; they may even feel their feet extending into the floor.

These two simple exercises came to be the concept of grounding—a concept unique to bioenergetics. It developed slowly over the years as it became evident that all patients lacked a sense of having their feet firmly planted on the floor. This lack corresponded to their being “up in the air” and out of touch with reality. Grounding or getting a patient in touch with reality, the ground he stands on, his body and his sexuality, has become one of the cornerstones of bioenergetics.

My body gradually became more relaxed and stronger. I recall losing the feeling of brittleness. I sensed that though I could be hurt, I would not break. I also lost my irrational fear of pain. Pain, I learned, was tension, and I found that when I gave in to the pain, I could understand

the tension that produced it, and this invariably brought about its release.

The emphasis is always on breathing, feeling, and movement, coupled with the attempt to relate the present-day energetic functioning of the individual to his life history.

A mother is an infant's first ground, or to put it differently, an infant is grounded through its mother's body. Earth and ground are symbolically identified with the mother, who is a representative of ground and home....My patients failed to develop a sense of being grounded or rooted because of a lack of sufficient pleasurable contact with their mothers' bodies. ..A mother who is herself uprooted cannot provide the sense of security and grounding a baby needs.

Reich...noted the common tendency of patients to hold their breath and inhibit exhalation as a means of controlling their feelings. He concluded that holding the breath served to diminish the organism's energy by reducing its metabolic activities, which in turn decreased the production of anxiety.

For Reich, then, the first step in the therapeutic procedure was to get the patient to breathe easily and deeply. The second was to mobilize whatever emotional expression was most evident in the patient's face or manner.

Breathing (several minutes) Lie in bed and breathe as freely as you can, trying to allow a deep expiration to occur. Give in to your body and don't control any expression or impulse that emerges.

Hand Exercise (one minute) Hold your hand straight out in front of you, keeping your arm relaxed, and focus all your attention on your hand. Keep the focus on your hand.

You may sense a streaming into your hand, which now feels charged and tingling. It may begin to vibrate or shake a little. If you sense this, you may realize that you have directed a stream of excitation or energy into your hand.

Hand Exercise II (one minute) Press the spread fingers of one hand against the fingers of the other hand, holding the palms and heels of the hands as much apart as possible. Now keeping the same contact, turn the hands inward so that they point toward the chest, and move the hands forward without breaking their contact. Hold them in this position of hyperextension

while breathing easily. Afterwards, the hands are relaxed and held out loosely. (Pause, then move on to Energy Exercise.)

You may again experience the streaming, the charging, the tingling and the vibration. You may also note that your attention is focused on your hands because of the increased charge in them. Your hands are in a state of increased tension or charge which may be translated as they are attention.

Energy Exercise Bring the two hands slowly toward each other until the palms are about two to three inches apart in their fully relaxed state while they are still charged, you may sense a charge between them as if it had substance and body.

Falling Exercise Take a position in front of a stool or chair that is to be touched for balance only. The feet are six inches apart, and the knees almost fully bent. The body is pitched forward until the heels are slightly off the ground. The body weight should then be on the balls of the feet but not on the toes. The body should be arched backward and the pelvis brought forward without strain to form an unbroken arc. Press downward on both heels without letting them touch the floor. This can be prevented by leaning forward and keeping the knees bent. The pressure on the heels stops one from moving forward; the bent knees do not allow a rising to occur. Breathing should be abdominal but easy. The belly should be out, and the pelvis held loosely. Hold this position for as long as you can without making it a test of will or endurance. When you can't hold the position any longer, fall forward on your knees onto a blanket.

In this exercise, it is not necessary to use any conscious pressure since the force of gravity will act as a downward pressure. This is quite strong, and if the thigh muscles are tense, a fair amount of pain will be experienced in them. When it becomes unbearable, one falls. Generally, the legs will go into vibration before one has to fall. Also, if breathing is relaxed and deep and one stays loose, the vibration will extend to the pelvis, which will move forward and backward involuntarily.

Falling frees the legs from the strain of having to hold oneself up because of fear. Rocking the pelvis (we do it backward to release muscular tensions associated with suppressed anal sadism) reduces the muscular tensions in the hips and in the pelvic girdle. Twisting the towel and hitting the bed have similar effects on other parts of the body.

Jaw Exercise Your jaw should hang loose in an attitude of letting go or surrender to the body...helpful to have patients stick their jaws out in an attitude of defiance. Mobilizing this aggressive expression released some of the tension in the contracted jaw muscles.

Because of the strategic location of the portcullis for the personality, the tension in the muscles that move the jaw is the keystone to the holding pattern in the rest of the body. It was necessary, as Reich discovered, to apply some pressure to the jaw muscles to effect the release. It is also

necessary to work through the repressed biting impulses that are bound in the chronic tension of the jaw muscles.

One learns that giving in to the superior forces of nature does not have a destructive effect and that one does not have to use his will constantly to fight these forces. Whatever its origin, every holding pattern represents in the present the unconscious use of the will against the natural forces of life.

Rising Exercise Begin on both knees on a folded blanket on the floor. Your feet are extended behind you. Next, put one foot forward while leaning forward so that part of your weight is shifted to that foot. Now feel your foot on the floor and rock back and forth on it to increase that feeling. Next, lift yourself slightly and put all your weight on the bent forward leg. Now, if you push down hard enough on that leg, you will find yourself rising. If this is done correctly, you will actually feel a force moving upward through your body from the ground, straightening you up from below. Do this twice on each leg to develop the feeling of pressing on the ground and rising.

This is not an easy exercise to do, and most people have to lift themselves up a little to help the process. With practice it becomes easier, and one learns how to direct the energy downward into the leg in order to rise.

I have defined love as the anticipation of pleasure, but it is particularly sexual pleasure that lures one to falling in love. Psychologically, it involves a surrender of the ego to the loved object, who becomes more important to the self than the ego. But the surrender of the ego involves a descent of feeling in the body, a downward flow of excitation into the deep abdomen and pelvis. This downward flow produces delicious streaming and melting sensations. One literally melts with love. The same lovely sensations occur when one's sexual excitement is very strong and not limited to the genital area. They precede every full orgasmic release.

The key to this phenomenon is the release of the diaphragm, allowing a strong excitation to flow into the lower part of the body. This becomes clear to us when we realize that holding one's breath in these activities introduces anxiety and destroys the pleasure. The same thing happens in sex. If one is afraid to go with the fall and so holds his breath, the melting sensation does not occur, and the climax is only partially satisfactory.

Falling or collapsing is nature's safeguard against the danger of unremitting stress. There is just so much stress a body can take before it breaks down.

Leg Exercise (2 minutes) Lie on your back on the bed and extend both legs upward. If the ankles are flexed and the heels thrust upward, the stretch placed on the muscles of the back of the legs will generally cause them to vibrate.

Vibration of the body has another important function beyond that of releasing tension. It allows a person to experience and enjoy the body's involuntary movements. These are an expression of its life, of its vibrant force. The body's involuntary movements are the essence of its life. The beat of the heart, the cycle of respiration, the peristaltic movements of the intestines – all are involuntary actions. But even on the total body level, these involuntary movements are the most meaningful! We convulse with laughter, cry for pain or sorrow, tremble with anger, jump for joy, leap with excitement and smile with pleasure. Because these are spontaneous, unwilled or involuntary actions, they move us in a deep, meaningful way. And most fulfilling, most satisfying and most meaningful of these involuntary responses is the orgasm in which the pelvis moves spontaneously and the whole body convulses with the ecstasy of release.

The orgasm, as Reich described it, does occasionally happen to people, and it is an ecstatic experience. But it is also quite rare, as Reich himself recognized. A totality of response to any situation is unusual in our culture. We are all in too much conflict to surrender fully to any feeling.

Orgasm Reflex (2 minutes) Lie on the bed, knees bent so that the feet make contact with the bed. Head is back to get it out of the way, so to speak. The arms lie at your sides. The breathing should be easy and deep with no muscular tension blocking the respiratory waves as they pass through the body, the pelvis moving spontaneously with each breath.

Expiration: The pelvis rises upward. The head moves backward. The throat moves forward.

Inhalation: The pelvis falls backward. The head comes forward or upward, and the throat and pelvis move backward.

Reich pictured the reflex as a movement in which the two ends of the body come together. The head, however, does not take part in this forward movement but falls back.

The orgasm reflex occurs on a low level of excitation and is a gentle movement. One experiences the reflex as a pleasurable feeling of inner freedom and ease. It denotes the absence of tension in the body. This movement is called an orgasm reflex because it occurs in every case of a full orgasm. In a partial orgasm there is also some involuntary pelvic movement, but the whole body doesn't fully give in to it.