

Over 50 Exercises to Ground Mind and Body

GETTING GROUNDED



A Manual of Grounding Exercises

For grounding alone, with a partner, at home, at work, when anxious

Michael Nagel, M.A

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Published by Michael Nagel LLC

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Photography by Jeremy Holloway

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ISBN 978-0-615-28821-5

Remain true to the earth, my brethren, with the power of your virtue! Let your bestowing love and your knowledge be devoted to be the meaning of the earth! Thus do I pray and conjure you.

Let it not fly away from the earthly and beat against eternal walls with its wings! Ah, there hath always been so much flown-away virtue!

Lead, like me, the flown-away virtue back to the earth- yea, back to body and life: that it may give to the earth its meaning, a human meaning!

The character Zarathustra in Thus Spake Zarathustra
by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

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About Grounding

What a piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals....

~ The character of Hamlet in *Hamlet*
by William Shakespeare (1564-1616),

To walk upright upon this earth, graced with the innate dignity of being human is a privilege. However for one reason or another many of us do not enjoy this privilege, for we have not fully taken human form, we have not fully incarnated. Yes, our bodies have been born into this world, but our selves resist embodiment. We remain disembodied to some extent. We are ungrounded.

Being Ungrounded

When we are not grounded, we are dissociated from our bodies whose very existence is an invitation to become immersed in a world of sensory aliveness, immediacy, joy and pain. Sometimes we experience this dissociation as living unaware of our legs and feet, as if floating through life. Sometimes we experience dissociation as being numb to life below the neckline. Sometimes we even feel ourselves to be outside of our bodies. What is your experience like? As you go through your day, do you experience your legs and feet? Are you accident prone? A klutz? Do you often have no idea how a bruise on your body occurred?

Recoiling from the invitation to aliveness, when we are ungrounded, we withdraw our energy into our heads. Our lives become cerebral. We live from the tower of the mind. Some of us would spend our lives in fantasies. Others would nest in intellectual pursuits. This is not to say that intellect and fantasy have no place. Rather it is to suggest that the life of the mind be integrated and balanced with the life of the body, as in the Greek ideal of a "sound mind, sound body." Are you "spacey?" Do you prefer to sit in your armchair, and read about romance to your getting dressed, going out, and finding it?

An ungrounded life is a life whose mind and heart and body are not integrated. The lack of integration is experienced as an imbalance of energy distribution. Energy is unevenly distributed throughout the physical organism. The bulk of energy functions in the head's cerebral activity. Our awareness is centered in the head, rather than distributed

throughout our bodily frame. If asked, "Where in your body is your sense of self?" would you answer, "In the head"?

Sometimes this imbalance of mental energy and mental functioning becomes excessive. We then find ourselves becoming "absent minded", always misplacing our keys or purse. Or we become scattered, even frantic like a "chicken with its head cut off", running here and there, implicitly resenting the limits of time and space which our embodiment has imposed upon us. Sometimes this imbalance of mental energy so exceeds our capacity to tolerate it, that we become anxious or panicked. Are you typically absent-minded", or scattered? Do you worry a lot? Do your all-too-many thoughts keep you awoken at night? Do you feel anxiety? Panic attacks?

When we are ungrounded, not only are we disconnected from ourselves, but also we are disconnected from the world and the life that greet us through touch, taste, sound, smell, sight, heart, and intellect. We experience life through the filter of thought rather than the immediacy of sensation and feeling. Rather than experience with bare awareness a beautiful sunset's vibrating thrill coursing through our being, we abstract ourselves from such aliveness with the thought, "Oh, what a beautiful sunset!" The thought is not the experience. We are not present to the moment: thought interposes between us and the immediacy of directly experiencing life here, now, in the present moment. Are you present?

In one way or another, being ungrounded expresses an implicit unwillingness to be here, in the immediacy of the moment. It is an unwillingness to fully incarnate, to be complete our incarnating into this world by becoming fully embodied. The reasons why we would just as soon remain there than be here are many. Perhaps a great personal loss has turned us away from life. A trauma such as a car accident. A shock. A bodily wound. Perhaps we were abused emotionally, physically, or sexually in childhood, and we found safety in withdrawal. Perhaps we simply felt unwelcome into this world by our parents. Research shows that even the nature of our births and our prenatal conditions can disincline us from taking our place in the world in our bodies.

Being ungrounded is an act of profound intelligence. It is an act of intelligence to defend from, to withdraw from pain. To occasionally find ourselves thrown off and ungrounded by events is understandable. But when our withdrawal from aliveness, our being ungrounded, is a character style, a way of life, then it is problematic. Yes, we may have suffered a great loss, a trauma, abuse, or even life-threatening conditions in the womb. And these experiences become the past. These causative events no longer exist except as memory imprints that persist in body and mind. (Yet what may exist in the present moment may be environmental factors which may augment our tendencies to be ungrounded – such as a stressful job, moving house, etc.) Life's promise can be realized only in the present moment, in the body, experiencing ourselves being fully alive.

To become fully alive, we need to step down from the tower of the intellect, and dip our whole selves into the body, its senses, the world, and the waters of life. We need to be grounded.

What is grounding?

To be grounded is to be embodied presence. It is to consciously experience our lives here, where we are, now, in the present moment, in our bodies and through our senses. Ideally it is to experience 24/7 the life of sensation.

When we are grounded, we inhabit our bodies. We *experience* our bodily sensations. What is below our necks is not alien to us. We feel our head connected to our torso, our torso connected to our legs, our feet contacting the earth which supports us. We experience the aliveness of our ever-changing bodily sensations. We experience life's vibrancy through senses. We take our place, here, in the world with our upright stance.

When we are grounded, the mind/body integration we experience expands the range of our aliveness to include not only the wonders of the mind, but also the wonders of feeling and of sensation. Our awareness is distributed throughout the body, not just concentrated in the head. Our energy flows through our arms and hands and through our legs, feet, and senses to contact and interchange energy this physical world in which we find ourselves.

Psychologically our experience of being grounded endows us with a felt sense of self that is distributed throughout the body, not localized in the head. We feel our chest. We feel our belly. We feel solid. We feel stable. To be grounded is an achievement of ego development which signals the completion of the process of physical embodiment. We are fully incarnated.

And so, as we transition from an ungrounded life to a grounded life, we experience ourselves differently. No longer do we feel ourselves outside our bodies. We're less klutzy. We know how we got the bruise on our leg; we felt the pain when we bumped it against the chair. We find ourselves more present, experiencing less "spacing out." We're less absent-minded. That armchair where once evenings were spent reading romances sometimes now is empty, when we're out socializing; although sometimes it overflows with the arms and legs of two, snuggling.

Our increasing groundedness reflects itself in a developing inner calm. Yes, there will always be ups and downs, but we are less likely to be thrown off our feet by them. We worry less. We sleep more soundly, not being kept awake by thoughts. Yes, we are less anxious. And perhaps we can trust now that those panic attacks really are becoming a thing of the past. We're aware of feeling a vital aliveness stirring within us. We're opening to life. We're arriving, here.

Becoming Grounded

To become grounded is to get from the "there" of our mental distraction to the "here" of our embodiment in the sensed immediacy of the present place and the present moment. We can help make this transition by our undertaking a regular grounding practice which we practice just as diligently as we would train for any sport.

Training to become grounded entails work along different lines that will redistribute throughout the body the biophysical energy and its corollary awareness that are concentrated in the head and upper torso when we are ungrounded.

Getting Grounded

One line of work is the regular practice of grounding exercises that will help to loosen the chronic tensions in the muscles, tendons, and cartilage which inhibit not only the flow of the life force throughout the body but also the felt contact with the earth upon which we stand.

Another line of work is to foster mind/body integration. When ungrounded, we may spend our lives preoccupied with a ceaseless panorama of mental activity including intellectual pursuits, fantasies, daydreams, worries, etc. When grounded, yes we may continue to enjoy the privilege of an intellect. However, we will do so while enjoying an (ideally) uninterrupted experience of our bodily sensations.

Additionally we can evaluate our lives in terms of those environmental factors that contribute to our being ungrounded, and we may make whatever changes we deem necessary. What is causing stress? How can we make changes to reduce the stress? What dietary changes might we make, such as reducing stimulants such as caffeine and refined sugar? What lifestyle changes need to be made to balance intellectual activity with physical activity?

The exercises described in this manual can provide a complete foundation for developing your own grounding training program. Suggestions for just such a training program will be offered later. However, to develop a deeper understanding of how grounding works, it would help to examine the anatomy of grounding.

The Anatomy of Grounding – West and East

Given that the body is the basic instrument of grounded living, our practice of grounding exercises can be enhanced by understanding the anatomy of grounding. For although being grounded is being embodied, some parts of the body are more significant than others in their contributions to grounded awareness.

Western Grounding Anatomy

Western somatic practices generally recognize the importance of the hands, feet, belly, and senses in grounding. With the hands we “get a grip” on reality. With the feet we “get our feet on the ground”. Dancers, athletes, and somatic psychologists recognize the belly as the body’s physical center of gravity. The senses, especially the eyes, relate us to the world in which our embodied presence takes its place.

The West also recognizes the role in grounding of the legs, ankles, and feet. As the head rests upon the torso, so the torso rests upon the legs, ankles, and feet. Grounded awareness extends energy and feeling into the legs, ankles, and feet.

Of importance also is the understanding that the chronic tensions of the muscles and tendons and the relative inflexibility of the cartilage inhibit the flow of biophysical energy and blood through the body. Such tensions and inflexibility especially in the lower torso, legs, and feet interfere with grounding. Therefore many grounding exercises in this manual are designed to loosen and mobilize these muscles and tendons.

Eastern Grounding Anatomy

Generally, Western somatic practices are ignorant of the contributions to knowledge made by Eastern somatic practices. This is folly, given that the West has developed somatic practices over several decades, and the East has developed somatic practices over several *millennia*.¹

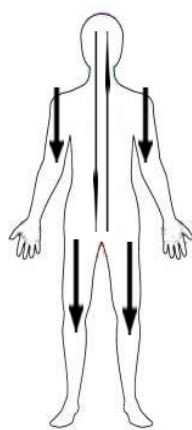
It is the same human body which has been studied by East and West with very similar results, such as the importance of hands, feet, and senses in grounding. However, there are also important differences to Eastern and Western approaches to grounding which warrant the inclusion of the Eastern perspective in our approach to grounding.

Despite West and East both recognizing the existence of the body’s biophysical energy (*qi/chi* or *prana* in the East and “orgone” in the West), the West’s approach to grounding emphasizes the role of anatomy, whereas the East’s approach emphasizes energy. For example Western practices emphasize the hands and feet in grounding; Eastern

practices emphasize the *energetic centers* located in the hands and the feet by which energy is exchanged with the environment thereby resulting in grounding.

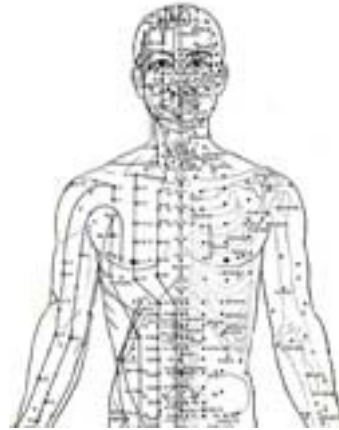
Another difference is that although some Western somatic practices acknowledge the presence in the body of a biophysical energy (i.e, the “orgone” of Reichian related practices), the West’s schemata of bodily energies compares to the East, as a Cro-Magnon cave painting compares to a da Vinci. Therefore this manual’s approach to grounding includes Eastern perspectives.

Diagram 1: Western & Eastern Views of Energy Anatomy



Western Somatic View

Orgone energy flows up the back presumably along the spine and down the front center of the torso, down the arms, and down the legs



Eastern View (Partial)

Qi or pranic energy flows along hundreds of energy meridians through thousands of acupuncture points

With regard to the anatomy of grounding, Eastern practices such as Taoism and Traditional Chinese Medicine inform us that there are special energy centers in the body which strongly influence our experience of being grounded: the lower *dantien* (also known as *kath* and *hara*), the *lao gong*, *yong quan*, and *hui yin*.

When doing the exercises, you can presume that wherever the hands, feet, or crown of the head are used for grounding, the energy centers associated with those anatomical parts are contributing to the grounding benefit of the exercise. Since this is the case, it is helpful to have a precise understanding of their location.

Lower Dan Tien, (Kath, Hara)

The lower *dan tien* is located approximately three finger widths below the navel and two finger widths from the ventral surface of the belly. It is likened to a reservoir or ball of energy whose size and compactness is said to vary from person to person, depending upon the individual's development. This center is situated at the body's center of gravity. It is said to source the body's vital energies.



Lao Gong

Each hand has a *lao gong* energy point or center that runs through the palm and the back of the hand. The *lao gong* often is used to distribute energy as in healing with hands or the giving of a blessing. It is also an energetic center of contact with the outer world.



Getting Grounded

Yong Quan

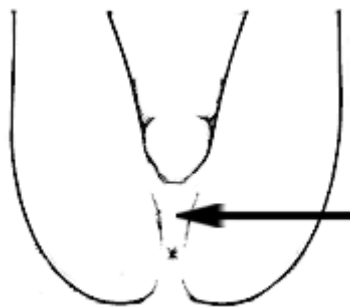
The *yong quan* energy center or point just beneath the ball of each foot. It is said to be the primary gateway through which *yin* (grounding earth) energy enters the body. Excess (*yang*) energy which ungrounds us also can be directed out of the body through the *yong quan*.



Foot reflexology and acupuncture charts depict the soles of the feet as possessing numerous energy points. It is through these many energy points of the feet that the body's biophysical energy system typically contacts the earth's energetic holding environment.

Hui Yin

The *hui yin* point is located in the perineum at the base of the torso, midway between the genitals and the anus. Certain energetic practices will use the *hui yin* center as an additional means of energetic grounding.



Bai Hui

The *bai hui* energy point corresponds to the crown of the head or the crown chakra of Hindu chakra system. It is said to be the primary gateway through which *yang* (metaphorical “sky” or “heavenly”) energy enters the body. This energy is thought to be of a faster vibration which substantiates consciousness, relative to the more dense *yin* energy that substantiates matter. Just as excessive *yin* energy can lead to depletion, excessive *yang* energy can lead to overstimulation and ungroundedness.



Suggestions for How to Do the Exercises

Where

Ideally, grounding exercises should be done outdoors, standing on grass or dirt with bare feet. Eastern energy practices inform us that the direct contact of the feet with the earth facilitates grounding. Being outdoors, our health also more directly benefits from the energies of the sun, the earth, and the air.

If indoors, do the exercises in bare or stocking feet. No shoes. Preferably choose a room that is ventilated with an open window, for the air carries qi energy. A carpet or yoga mat can soften some of the floor exercises.

Remember also that you can do grounding exercises even at the office in the privacy of your cubicle, an unused conference room, a bathroom stall, or even amidst an ongoing meeting (see the Grounding at the Workplace section).

When

Of course grounding can be done not only anywhere, but also anytime. If you have decided to practice grounding on an ongoing basis, it's helpful to do the exercises each day at the same time, for you will develop a routine that will make it easier to follow through with your intention.

If you learn how to recognize the symptoms of your being ungrounded, then when you discover yourself to be ungrounded, you can do some grounding exercises. For example, if you recognize you are anxious, scattered, or dissociated, just stop what you're doing, and take some time to do some grounding exercises. It makes a difference!

How Often

A *daily* grounding practice yields the quickest benefits. This can be supplemented with an attentiveness throughout the day to your being grounded through, taking moments to ground yourself as needed. Practiced diligently, within several weeks you will experience differences.

As your grounding becomes secured over several months of daily practice, you may sense when you can ease up on your practice. Practice daily until the evidence of being grounded replaces the previous symptoms of your being ungrounded.

However, keep in mind that grounding is a life-long practice. You will always want to be mindful of your grounding. When life's exigencies throw you off balance, you remember to do some exercises to restore your grounding.

How to Do the Exercises

Here are some suggestions for how to do the exercises:

Slowly: You're not in a rush. The more you rush, the more you're in your head treating the exercise as another task, rather than being in your body experiencing the exercise. Bring your presence to your exercises.

Sensing: Grounding facilitates mind/body integration. Bring your awareness to how your body *feels* while doing an exercise. *Experience* your body and its sensations as you exercise.

Breathing: Breathe through an open mouth while doing the exercises. This allows a greater intake of oxygen and qi. This is especially helpful during some of the more stressful positions. Some of us have the unconscious habit of sometimes holding our breathe. Remember during all the exercises (as well as all of life) to breathe freely, allowing the natural pulsation of the in-breath and out-breath.

Repetitions: Except for a few exercises, there are no prescribed numbers of repetitions; there are no prescribed durations for holding different positions. Just as a stretching exercise might be done to experience and enjoy the stretch, so too do you can do each grounding exercise to experience the loosening, stretching, sensing, relaxing, or calming that it might offer.

No gain, if pain: Treat your body as if it were part of your person, not an object. If you experience pain, stop. Consult a physician or somatic practitioner.

At the end of each exercise, pause for a few seconds in order to experience the difference which the exercise has made in how you feel and sense your body.

Which Exercises to Do?

This manual offers a large variety of grounding exercises, and it would be unrealistic for you to practice every exercise on a regular basis. How then do you choose which exercises to do?

Generally we can view the exercises as belonging to two broad categories: exercises which **develop** your grounded mind/body integration and exercises which help you **manage** your inner state of mind/body when you are feeling ungrounded. While the focus of these different types of exercise might differ, of course developmental exercises can help to manage your ungroundedness, and self-management exercises can develop your grounded mind/body integration.

Developmental exercises: The developmental exercises are excellent for developing a daily grounding practice. Done regularly, they contribute to the cultivation of a grounded way of life.

Getting Grounded

Some developmental exercises work to loosen the chronic muscular tensions held in the lower body's muscles, cartilages, and tendons. This allows the torso's energy and sensory awareness to extend down the legs to the feet, thereby bringing the embodied person in relation to the earth. These exercises include:

- Exercise 2: Rolling Foot on Ball
- Exercise 3: Standing on Tennis Racket Handle
- Exercise 4: Ankle Rotations
- Exercise 5: Sitting on Heels
- Exercise 6: Ankle Mobilizing
- Exercise 7: Standing on the Sides of the Foot
- Exercise 8: Standing with Knees Bent, Feet Shoulder with Apart
- Exercise 9: Taoist Leg Pump
- Exercise 10: Bouncing in Legs
- Exercise 11: Jumping Up & Down
- Exercise 12: The Curl (1)
- Exercise 13: The Curl (2)
- Exercise 14: The Curl (3)
- Exercise 15: The Curl (4)
- Exercise 16: The Curl (5)
- Exercise 19: Rotating the Pelvis
- Exercise 20: Rocking the Pelvis

Other exercises focus on developing the embodied, sensory-based consciousness enjoyed by grounded persons:

- Exercise 49: Five Things
- Exercise 50: Sensing with Bare Awareness
- Exercise 51: Maintaining Presence in Hara

There is one developmental exercise taken from the Taoist contemplative tradition whose purpose is to awaken the energy centers of the feet in order to foster the energetic contact with the ground:

- Exercise 1: Awaken the Energy Points on the Soles of the Feet

Self-management exercises: The exercises are excellent for grounding, centering, and calming yourself whenever you might feel the need to during your day.

Some self-management exercises help when you feel panicky or especially anxious:

- Exercise 45: Abdominal Breathing
- Exercise 46: Stomping Your Feet
- Exercise 47: Taoist Foot Stomp
- Exercise 48: Discharge Yell

Other exercises can be done with your partner or friend:

- Exercise 32: Holding the Head (1)
- Exercise 33: Holding the Head (2)
- Exercise 34: Holding the Feet
- Exercise 35: Head on Hands
- Exercise 36: Massage
- Exercise 37: Head and Shoulders
- Exercise 38: Paired Bouncing in Legs
- Exercise 39: Paired Jumping Up & Down
- Exercise 40: Curling with a Partner

Other exercises are designed for your grounding yourself at your workplace:

- Exercise 41: Foot Tapping
- Exercise 42: Office Chair Isometric
- Exercise 43: Chair/Work Surface Isometric
- Exercise 44: Bathroom Discharge

And others expediently help you to ground:

- Exercise 17: Sitting Against Wall
- Exercise 18: Leaning Against Wall
- Exercise 21: Shaking Arms & Legs
- Exercise 22: Slapping Your Body
- Exercise 23: Lying on the Floor
- Exercise 24: Rolling on the Floor
- Exercise 25: Rocking on the Floor
- Exercise 26: Child's Pose (1)
- Exercise 27: Child's Pose (2)
- Exercise 28: Sitting on the Floor
- Exercise 29: Resting on All Fours
- Exercise 30: Head on Floor
- Exercise 31: Head on Pillow

Suggestions for a daily grounding practice: While you will want to experiment with each exercise to discover which exercises appeal to you for a daily grounding practice, the following table lists exercises that I would recommend for a daily grounding practice. They are listed in the order that I might do them.

Table 1: Suggestions for a Daily Grounding Practice

Five Things	Exercise 49
Shaking Arms & Legs	Exercise 21
Slapping Your Body	Exercise 22
Awaken the Energy Points of the Feet	Exercise 1
Rolling Foot on Ball	Exercise 2
Ankle Rotations	Exercise 4
Sitting on Heels	Exercise 5
Ankle Mobilizing	Exercise 6
Standing on the Sides of the Foot	Exercise 7
Standing with Knees Bent, Feet Apart	Exercise 8
Taoist Leg Pump	Exercise 9
Bouncing in Legs	Exercise 10
Jumping Up & Down	Exercise 11
The Curl	Exercise 12,13, 14, 15, or 16
Rotating the Pelvis	Exercise 19
Rocking the Pelvis	Exercise 20
Sensing with Bare Awareness *	Exercise 50
Maintaining Presence in Hara *	Exercise 51

* These exercises are to be practiced throughout your day

Disclaimer:

Ideally the following exercises should be learned under the guidance of a qualified somatic teacher. If an exercise is too painful or too tiring, then cease doing it.

Grounding Exercises for the Feet and Ankles

Overview

Your legs are the two columns upon which your torso rests. The feet of your columns rest upon the earth. Just as the body has a subtle biophysical energy, the earth has a subtle electromagnetic energy. The feet sensitively relate the energies of your body and the earth to each other. The suppleness of your feet and ankles also provides greater stability to your balance. The flexibility of the muscles, tendons, and cartilage of your feet and ankles not only brings awareness and energy into the foot for an enhanced sense of contact with the earth, but also enhances the energy transfer between your body and the earth.

Exercise 1: Awaken the Energy Points on the Soles of the Feet

Traditional Chinese medicine suggests that the soles of the feet have numerous acupuncture points whereby the body exchanges energy with the earth. This Taoist qigong exercise facilitates grounding by stimulating these energy points.

Directions: Hold your foot with one hand. First moderately slap the sole of your foot several times with the palm of your other hand.

Then rub the length of the sole of your foot up and down. Rub from the heel to the toes and back to your heel. Repeat 100 times. Repeat with your other foot.



Exercise 2: Rolling Foot on Ball

This exercise not only activates the foot's energy points, it also mobilizes many of the foot's bones, muscles, tendons, and cartilage.

Directions: Stand on one foot. Place your other foot on top of a ball. A tennis ball is ideal, as it is firm and giving.

Shift some (but not all) of your weight onto the foot standing on the ball. Then roll the foot over the ball bringing the ball's massaging pressure to the sole's many areas. Repeat with the other foot.

Be careful. Some feet are more sensitive than others. Place only as much weight upon the ball as will result in pressure, not pain.



Exercise 3: Standing on Tennis Racket Handle

This exercise stimulates and mobilizes the muscles of the foot's longitudinal arch. The exercise was publicized to the somatic psychology community by Dr. Alexander Lowen, founder of Bioenergetic Analysis.²

Directions: Stand on one foot. Place your other foot on top of and along the length of a tennis racket handle. Instead of a tennis racket, you could stand on a wooden dowel.

Shift some (but not all) of your weight onto the foot standing on the handle. Press down upon handle. Repeat with the other foot.

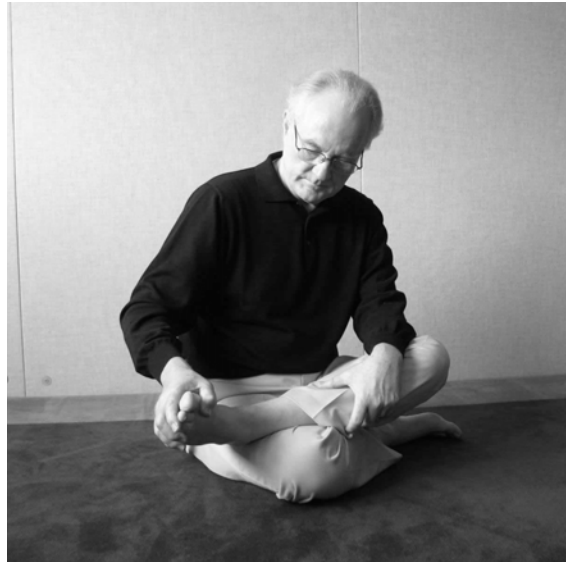
Be careful. Some feet are more sensitive than others. Place only as much weight upon the handle as will result in pressure, not pain.



Exercise 4: Ankle Rotations

When the ankle is chronically tense, the tension inhibits the energy flow between the foot and the leg. This is the first of several exercises which enhances the suppleness of the ankle.

Directions: Place your left leg across your right knee. Take firm hold of the sole of your left foot with your right hand, and then rotate your foot in circles. Rotate your foot to the full extent allowed by your ankle.



Exercise 5: Sitting on Heels

This ankle exercise works the front of the ankle. The exercise was first publicized to the somatic psychology community by Dr. Alexander Lowen.

Directions: On the floor, sit on your heels with your legs and feet extended beneath and behind you. This flattens the front of your ankle against the floor. Slowly shift your weight back and forth and from side to side.



Exercise 6: Ankle Mobilizing

Dr. Lowen also introduced this exercise which loosens the ankle's range of lateral movement.

Directions: From a kneeling position, place the left foot flat on the ground about 4" to 6" behind the right knee. Rest your chest on your left knee, shifting your weight to the left foot.

Slowly rock back and forth from heel to toe. As you do so, be careful to not lift the sole of your foot from full contact with the ground. Keep the left knee in line with the big toe of the left foot so as to not injure your knee. Repeat with the other foot.



Exercise 7: Standing on Sides of the Foot

This exercise stretches and strengthens the lateral muscles supporting the ankle.

Directions: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Then turn your ankles outwards, standing on the outer edge of your feet. Hold this position for 30 seconds.

Then turn your ankles inward toward each other and stand on the inner edge of your feet. Hold this position for 30 seconds.



Grounding Exercises for the Legs

Overview

These leg exercises will loosen the chronic tensions in your legs' thigh and calf muscles, tendons, and cartilages. This allows more energy and sensation in your legs. Your torso's energy and your sense of aliveness will extend into your legs and feet. As you do these exercises, you may experience this enhanced aliveness as a very fine trembling in your legs. Enjoy that trembling, should it occur.

Exercise 8: Standing with Knees Bent, Feet Shoulder with Apart

How you stand subtly affects how you take your stand in the world as a self. An unstable footing contributes to an unstable sense of self. A *sine qua non* (Latin for 'without which nothing') of a grounded way of life is to learn to stand with your knees flexed, and your feet shoulder width apart.

Locked knees inhibit the flow of energy up and down the leg. They also render the leg inflexible, reducing the body's ability to dynamically maintain its balance when pushed from front or behind. Similarly, standing with your feet too close to each other reduces your ability to recover your balance when pushed from the side. In short, locked knees and feet too close together render you a "push-over."

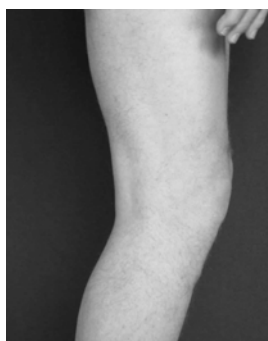
Try standing with your feet next to each other and your knees locked. Then have someone push you slightly from the front, back, and sides. Notice how you easily lose your balance? Now stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and your knees slightly flexed. Again have someone push you. Notice how more stable you are?



Feet Too Close



Shoulder-Width



Knees Flexed



Knees Locked

Exercise 9: Taoist Leg Pump

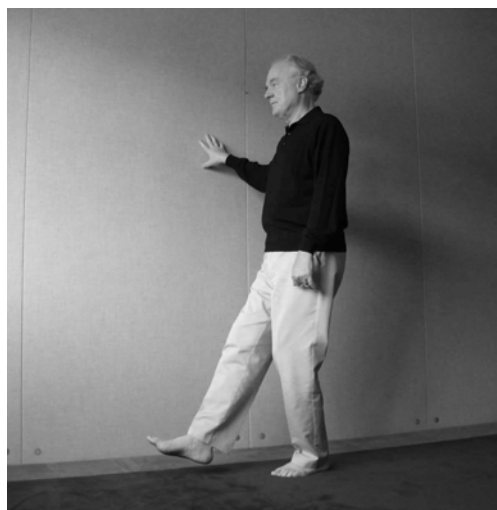
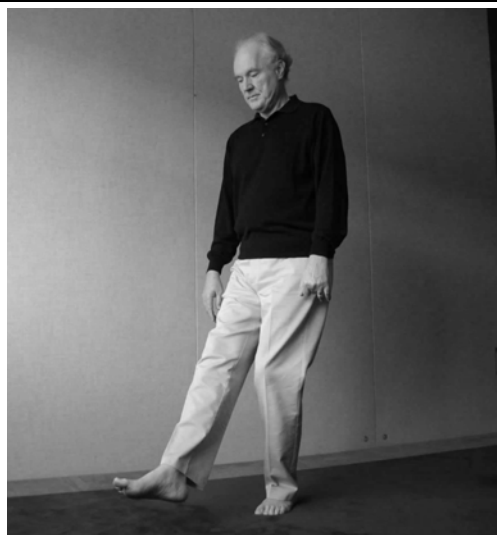
This Taoist exercise develops the legs' grounding capacity. Taoists may do this exercise up to 300 times per leg. As part of a daily grounding routine, you might do it 50 times per leg.

Directions: Stand on one leg. Then repeatedly bend and straighten that leg, in a rhythmic 'pumping' fashion. Each bending and straightening counts as one.

While pumping the leg on which you stand, with the other foot gently kick outwards. As your knee bends, you kick outwards. As your knee straightens, your foot returns. Each up and down pump counts as one.

Distribute your kicks in an arc from front to back. This stimulates your nervous system's capacity to physically balance.

If at first it is difficult to maintain your balance, do the exercise beside a wall, using the wall for support.



Exercise 10: Bouncing in Legs

This exercise sinks the energy into the lower torso and the legs.

Directions: Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, heels just slightly outturned, knees slightly bent. Focus your awareness on your belly, legs, and feet.

Gently bounce your torso up and down. At all times the soles of your feet should maintain complete contact with the floor.



Exercise 11: Jumping Up & Down

This exercise also sinks the energy into the feet, legs, and lower torso.

Directions: Focus your awareness on your belly, legs, and feet. Gently jump up and down. Let your jumping be relaxed and easy, not vigorous.

This is not an exercise to develop your capacity to jump. Instead the exercise seeks to sink your energy into your lower body.



Exercise 12: The Curl (1)

The Curl also was introduced by Dr. Lowen. Daily practice of the Curl loosens chronic tensions in the legs and feet, allowing for the free-flow of energy between the torso and the ground. This is the first of five variations.

Directions: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees bent. Turn the toes just slightly inward to open the *hui-yin* point in the perineum.

Slowly bend down to touch the floor with your fingers. Begin bending with your head and neck. Let gravity *slowly* curl your spine one vertebra at a time until your fingers touch the floor. In this variation, your fingers should not bear weight. They simply assist balance.

Balance your weight between the heels and balls of your feet. Breathe through an open mouth. Remain in this position for up to 2 minutes.

In the Curl, be sure that your neck is relaxed as if your head hangs loose like a ball on a string. Also be sure that your shoulders are relaxed so that your arms hang loosely. Bring your awareness to your body by sensing your lower torso, legs, and feet.

Finish by uncurling *slowly*. Begin uncurling with your lower vertebra of you waist. Slowly rise upwards, as if stacking one vertebra upon another, one at a time. While rising, your head, neck, and shoulders remain relaxed and loose. They will be the last to uncurl.

Curl and uncurl slowly, keeping your sensory awareness of your body.

Note as you may discover fine trembling sensations in your legs. Relax into this experience of the enhanced flow of energy and feeling in your legs and feet.



Exercise 13: The Curl (2)

This variation of the Curl suits more flexible persons. Its benefit is that the resting of the palms on the floor allows for the grounding of energy not only through the feet and legs, but also the hands and their *lao gong* points.

Directions: The directions for this variation are identical to Curl (1), except that rather than rest your fingertips upon the floor, you rest your palms on the floor.



Exercise 14: The Curl (3)

This Curl variation was developed by Charles Kelley Ph.D., founder of Radix®, a neo-Reichian somatic practice. This variation emphasizes the curvature of the upper spine. The exercise loosens the upper and middle spine structure. It is useful also for persons who cannot bend to the floor.

Directions: The directions also are identical to Curl (1), except that you bend down only as far as the wrists reaching the knee. By tucking in your rear, you emphasize the curve of the middle and upper spine.



Exercise 15: The Curl (4)

This variation emphasizes the stretching of the hamstring muscles.

Directions: Follow the Curl (1) directions to where your fingers touch the ground. Then walk your fingers forward, and gently straighten your legs *a bit*. These two movements will stretch the hamstring and calf muscles.

Be very careful not to overdo this exercise so as to cause yourself pain. Should you feel pain, discontinue this exercise. If pain, no gain!

To conclude the posture, walk your fingers back towards the feet, bend your knees slightly, and uncurl as you would in Curl (1).



Exercise 16: The Curl (5)

Dr. Lowen developed this curl variation to loosen the thighs' tight quadriceps muscles.

Directions: Follow the Curl (1) directions to the point of resting in the curled position for a minute. Then bend your legs so that you come all the way down to the floor resting on your haunches. Straighten your arms out before you, and lift your hands slightly off the floor. Shift your weight forward towards the balls of your feet *while at the same time not letting your heels lift off the floor*. Hold this position for as long as you can.

To uncurl, relax your arms and shoulders, straighten your legs, and uncurl as you would in Curl (1).



Other Standing Grounding Exercises

Overview

We can think of grounding exercises as serving either of two purposes: developing our capacity to be grounded or expediently discharging excess energy and getting us back in our bodies when we are ungrounded, scattered, anxious, or panicked.

Through daily practice, developmental exercises will loosen chronic tensions and restore flexibility to your tendons and cartilage. Exercises that focus upon restoring anatomical flexibility are primarily developmental. Exercises that focus on mind/body integration are both developmental and expedient. Practiced over time, mind/body integration practices will develop an integrated presence. Yet you can use these same mind/body exercises to ground your scattered or anxious mind in the Now of sensory awareness.

The exercises presented in prior sections focused upon the feet and the legs. Given that the flexibility in the feet and legs is essential to grounded living, many, but not all, of the prior exercises are developmental. In this section we increasingly turn our attention towards exercises that can expediently restore your grounding in your body, here, and now, when you are feeling ungrounded.

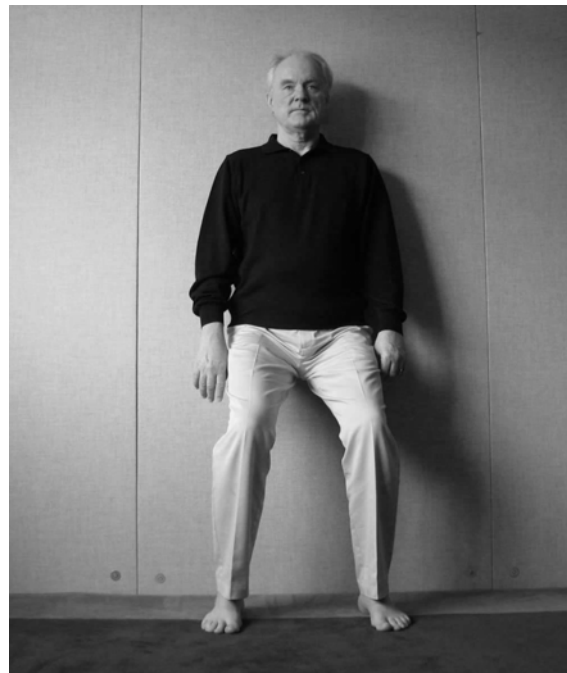
Exercise 17: "Sitting" Against Wall

This relaxing exercise grounds the body through the contact of the back with the wall and the feet with the ground.

Directions: With feet about a foot from a wall and shoulder-width apart, lean back and rest your back against the wall. Your legs should be bent no more than a 45-degree angle, otherwise the stress might charge your body with unwanted energy and unground you.

Sink your awareness and energy into your legs and feet. Feel the support of the wall. Breathe easily into your belly. Relax in this position for as long as you like.

Note this exercise could be done outdoors sitting against a tree, ideally barefoot.



Exercise 18: Leaning Against Wall

This exercise uses the arms, legs and eyes to ground.

Directions: Stand with one foot forward of the other, leaning into a wall with your arms at eye level. Focus your sight on a spot on the wall between your hands.

Push moderately into the floor with your legs and against the wall with your arms. Sense your feet, legs, arms, hands, and see the point at which you are looking. Breathe naturally. Rest in this position for a minute or longer, if you like.



Exercise 19: Rotating the Pelvis

This exercise loosens the muscles of the lower back and pelvic girdle, helping to free the flow of energy between the torso and the legs.

Directions: Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent, and hands on your hips. Imagine a plumb line hanging from your perineum (*hui yin*) to the floor. Slowly rotate your pelvis in one direction as if drawing on the floor an imaginary circle with the plumb line. Make the circle as large as possible. After awhile, change direction.



Exercise 20: Rocking the Pelvis

This exercise of Dr. Lowen also loosens the muscles of the lower back and pelvic girdle.

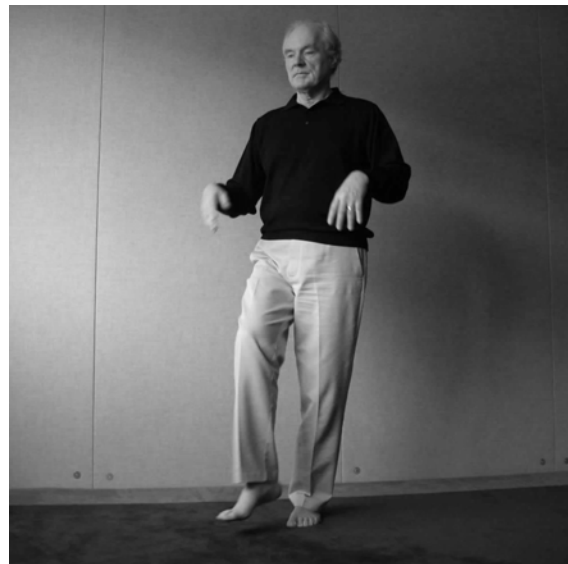
Directions: Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent, and hands on your hips. Slowly and *gently* rock your pelvis forward and back repeatedly. Let the movement originate from your feet and legs and extend to your pelvis in a wave-like motion. Don't bend your body or push from your pelvis.



Exercise 21: Shaking Arms & Legs

Some of us hold our energy more in the torso's core than the periphery of the body's limbs. This exercise energizes the four limbs with which you contact the world.

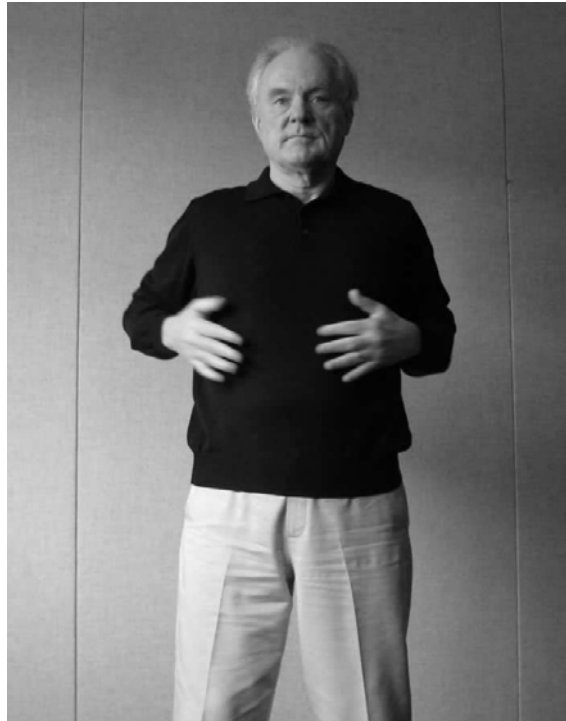
Directions: While standing, vigorously shake your arms and hands. As you do so, stand on one leg alternately, and vigorously shake the lifted foot.



Exercise 22: Slapping Your Body

This exercise mind/body integration exercise awakens your sensory awareness of your body's physical boundaries.

Directions: While standing with knees slightly bent, vigorously slap the surface of your body: the front, back, and sides of your legs, arms, torso, and head.



Grounding Exercises on the Floor

Overview

Chinese philosophy and contemplative practices such as Taoism describe the earth as having a “yin” or grounding energy. Perhaps this energy is related to the electro-magnetic charge of the earth’s core. Whichever the explanation, the body’s contact with the earth helps both to normalize the body’s excessive biophysical charge and also to reestablish the body’s energetic connection with its natural environment.

These exercises explore how you can work with the ground to reestablish energetic equilibrium and enhance mind/body integration. As you do these exercises, note how the soles of the feet (*yong quan*), the hands (*lao gong*), the skin, and the crown of the head (*bai hui*) are used to make contact with and exchange energies with the ground.

A Taoist might advise that since you are seeking contact with the earth, why not go outdoors and enjoy doing these exercises on the grass. Of course this could be said of most of the exercises in this manual.

Exercise 23: Lying on the Floor

The horizontal contact of the body with the ground and the contact of the hands and the feet all contribute to grounding.

Directions: Rest on the floor on your stomach and/or on your back for as long as you wish. Breathe easily. Experience the contact with the floor.

When on your stomach, rest the palms of your hands on the floor. When on your back, bend your knees, and place the soles of your feet on the floor. Also rest your palms on the floor.



Exercise 24: Rolling on the Floor

In addition to the energetic benefits of laying upon the floor, this exercise also helps to foster your mind/body integration.

Directions: With arms outstretched, *slowly* roll back and forth across the floor. As you do so, *experience* your body as its different surfaces make contact with the floor.



Exercise 25: Rocking on the Floor

This exercise also benefits grounding by virtue of the back's contact with the floor. The contact with the floor also enhances mind/body integration by awakening sensory awareness of the back of the torso. (Typically we are mostly aware of the front.)

Directions: Lie on your back, bring your knees up to your chest, and clasp them with both hands. Like a rocking chair, rock forward and back upon your spine. Repeat for awhile.



Exercise 26: Child's Pose (1)

The Child's Pose is an ancient yogic posture whose many benefits include grounding and relaxation.

Directions: Kneel on the ground with feet behind you. Fold your body forward with arms outstretched overhead, palms resting on the floor.

Rest your chest upon your thighs. Breathe slowly and deeply. Rest in this position for as long as you wish.

If your head is uncomfortable on the floor, you can bend your elbows and either stack your palms or fists under your forehead or simply place your hands under head.



Exercise 27: Child's Pose (2)

This is a variation of the yogic Child's Pose described above.

Directions: This variation is done the same as Child's Pose (1), except your arms extend behind you along the sides of your body with palms resting up. Your head simply rests on the floor (or a pillow).

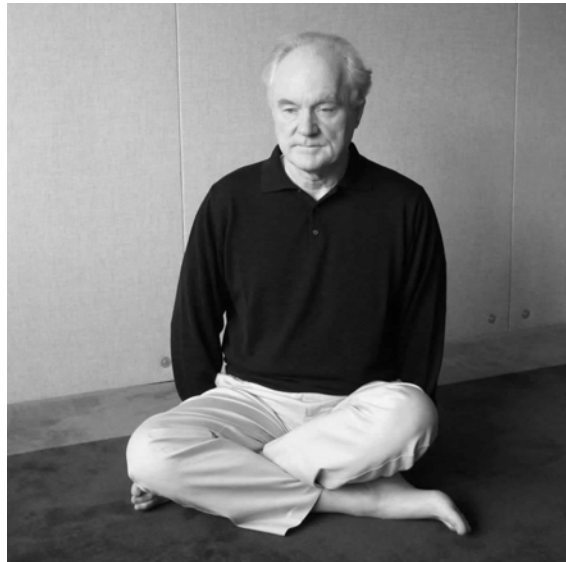
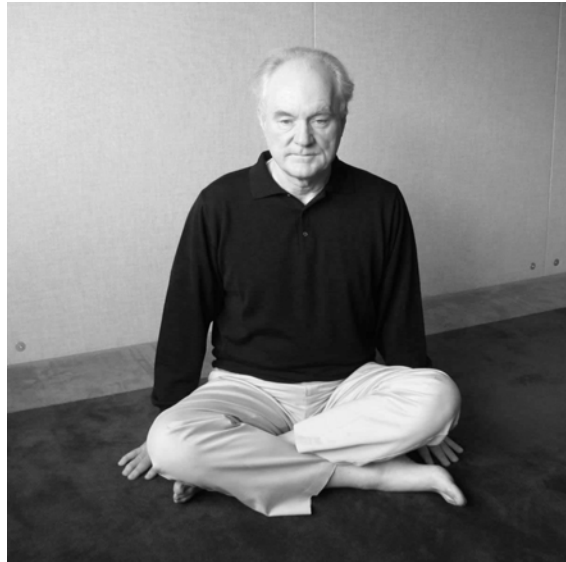


Exercise 28: Sitting on the Floor

This exercise illustrates how you can use your *lao gong* (palms) to bring grounding to any sitting-on-the-floor position.

Directions: While sitting on the floor, rub the palms of your hands together or against the floor to stimulate the hands' energy points. Then slightly push your hands against the floor to create firm contact. Then sense the floor, your hands, and your self.

Alternatively, you can sit on your hands (palms up or down). Or, you can kneel while placing your hands on the floor.



Exercise 29: Resting on All Fours

Dr. Lowen also first publicized this exercise.³ It differs significantly from the yoga child pose in that the body's ventral (front) side is *suspended* off of the knees. Therefore while resting, you can breathe relatively freely, and your abdomen can relax as it hangs loose.

Directions: Kneel on all fours with your palms flat on the floor. Stretch your arms forward. Push your rear back. Let your head hang loose from your relaxed neck. Let your belly hang loose. Breathe abdominally.



Exercise 30: Head on Floor

This exercise grounds excess energy in the head. It is an unhurried exercise during which you take your time to experience your head's contact with the floor.

Directions: Kneel on all fours. Gently place the crown of your head on the floor. If the top of your head is sensitive, you may want instead to place your head upon a pillow.

Slowly roll your head on the floor, side to side, front to back, etc. Experience making contact with the floor with as many different areas of your scalp as are possible.



Grounding with Others

Overview

The grounding exercises described in previous sections can be done alone or in groups. The exercises in this section explore how you can ground with a partner.

Each of the exercises in this section involve touch. When we touch another or when we are touched, there is the intimacy of contact. When both persons bring their sensitive awareness to these exercises, the exercises can foster emotional intimacy.

Exercise 31: Holding the Head's Crown

Holding the crown of the head offers a grounding sense of containment to your partner.

Directions: Have your partner lay down on his/her back with eyes closed. Place the palms of your hands upon the crown of your partner's head. Hold the head with a very *slight* pressure.

Relax in this position for a couple of minutes as you each breathe naturally.



Exercise 32: Holding the Head's Occiput

Holding the occipital ridge⁴ in a way that extends your palm and fingers down the length of the brain stem makes this head-holding exercise very relaxing.

Directions: Have your partner lay down on his/her back. Place the palms of your hands under your partner's head with your palms resting beneath the occiput, fingers extending lengthwise down the length of the neck.

Rest in this position for a couple of minutes.



Exercise 33: Holding the Feet

Holding your partner's feet helps to dissipate excess energy stored in the legs and the feet, thereby enhancing grounding.

Directions: Have your partner down upon his/her back. Place the palms of your hands lengthwise upon the soles of your partner's feet. Hold the feet with a slight forward pressure pressed upon the soles. Hold this position for several minutes.



Exercise 34: Head on Pillow

This is a variation of Exercise 30: Head on the Floor.

Directions: The directions are the same as in Exercise 30, except that your partner sits cross-legged on the floor holding a pillow in his/her lap. Place the top of your head upon the pillow. Sensitively explore the sensations of your head's contact with the pillow.



Exercise 35: Head on Hands

This is a variation of the above Head on Pillow exercise.

Directions: The directions are the same as the Exercise 34, except that your partner's hands are outstretched atop the pillow. Place the crown of your head in his/her hands. As you roll your head in the hands of your partner, sensitively experience your contact with your partner's hands.



Exercise 36: Massage

Massage is an enjoyable way to become grounded. Your mindful experience of being massaged encourages your mind/body integration.

Directions: Enjoy with your partner receiving and giving of a massage.



Exercise 37: Head and Shoulders

In this paired exercise, the hands on the head assist a grounding sense of containment, and the weight on the shoulders enhances the experience of the feet contacting the ground.

Directions: Stand with eyes closed, feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent.

Have your partner stand close behind you, and rest elbows upon your shoulders while also placing moderate weight upon your shoulders. In this position, your partner then folds palms atop the crown of your head.

Hold this position for a couple of minutes as each of you sense yourselves.



Exercise 38: Paired Bouncing in Legs

This exercise is a variation of Exercise 10: Bouncing in Legs.

Directions: Hold each other's hands. Focus your awareness on your belly, legs, and feet. Together, gently and rhythmically bounce your torso up and down. At all times your feet should not leave the floor. As you bounce, see each other.

As you bounce, experience the contact of your legs and feet with the ground. Also experience the contact with your partner's eyes and hands.



Exercise 39: Paired Jumping Up & Down

This exercise is a variation of Exercise 11: Jumping Up & Down.

Directions: Hold each other's hands. Focus your awareness on your belly, legs, and feet. Together, gently jump up and down. Let your jumping be relaxed and easy, not vigorous. While you jump, see each other.

As you jump, feel the contact of your legs and feet with the ground. Also experience the contact with your partner's eyes and hands.



Exercise 40: Curling with a Partner

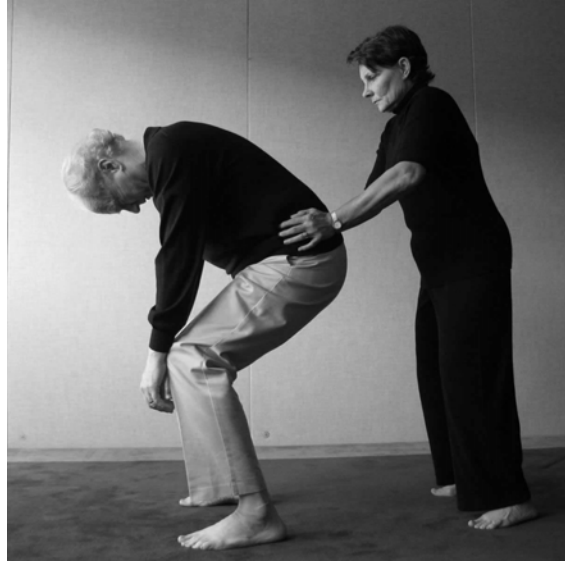
This exercise is a variation of Exercise 14: The Curl (3). This paired exercise enhances the experience of grounding because of the additional weight placed upon the legs.

Directions: Have your partner stand behind you as you follow the directions of Exercise 14: The Curl (3).

When you have lowered your body, have your partner take hold of your hips from behind, and moderately push down adding weight to your legs.

Hold this position for awhile, experiencing the contact of your feet with the floor and the moderately increased strain to your leg muscles. When you are ready to come up, signal your partner to release your hips, and come up as described in Exercise 12.

In this or any other grounding exercise, do not strain your muscles unduly. You are seeking to loosen the chronic tensions of your muscles, not injure them.



Grounding at the Workplace

Overview

Sometimes the stresses of our work life challenge our ability to remain grounded. Perhaps we are nervous about making a presentation, meeting with a boss, confronting a co-worker, or appeasing an irate customer. The opportunities for stress are many. Knowing how to ground ourselves at our workplaces is important.

In this section you will find examples of how to ground yourself while working in the contemporary workplace. These exercises and many of the preceding exercises can be done at work in the privacy of the bathroom, a cubicle, an office, or a conference room.

These exercises demonstrate the principle that wherever you might find yourself, whenever you feel ungrounded, you can find ingenious ways to do something that will restore your grounded presence.

Exercise 41: Foot Tapping

The exercise can be done almost anywhere – even in the middle of a meeting. The tapping helps to ground by stimulating your sensory awareness of your lower body.

Directions: While sitting in your chair, bring your awareness to your seat, legs, and feet. Tap the soles of your shoes against the floor. Experience the reverberation of the tapping in the soles of your feet and your legs.

If you had privacy or you were sitting around a conference table, you could even slip off your shoes, and tap your feet against the floor or rub the soles against the floor.

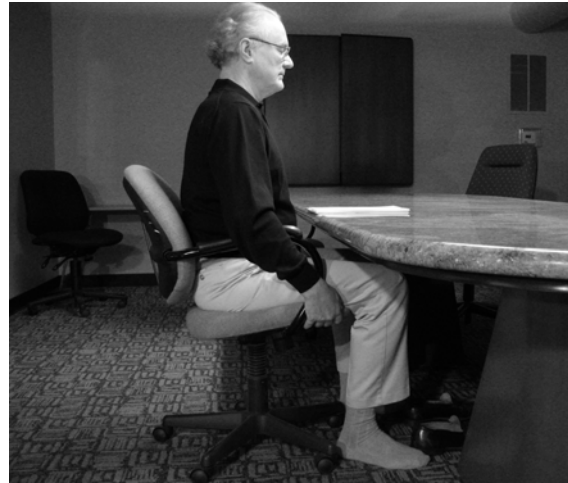


Exercise 42: Office Chair Isometric

The stress of this isometric exercise grounds you by bringing your awareness and energy into your body. You can do this exercise unobtrusively even while attending a meeting.

Directions: As you sit in a chair, with both hands hold the seat of your chair either on the sides or the front. Place your shoed feet flat on the floor. Relax your shoulders. Breathe through an open mouth.

Simultaneously pull against the seat of your chair, and push against the floor with your feet. Experience your body as you hold this position for a count of 10, and then relax completely. Repeat at least three times.



Exercise 43: Work Surface Isometric

This is another unobtrusive isometric exercise which can be done anywhere where there is a work surface and a chair.

Directions: As you sit with your feet flat on the floor, place your hands under the work surface (e.g., conference room table, desktop, etc.) with palms up, resting flat against the underneath of the work surface. Relax your shoulders. Breathe through an open mouth.

Simultaneously push against the underside of the work surface, and push against the floor. Sense your body as you hold this position for a count of 10, and then relax completely. Repeat at least three times.



Exercise 44: Bathroom Discharge

Professional speakers use this technique to ground themselves before presenting. It demonstrates the principle of grounding by discharging excess energy.

Directions: If your work place or presentation venue permits it, find a bathroom wherein you can be alone for a few minutes.

Then jump up and down a few times. Stomp your feet. Yell, make noises. Get the anxious energy moving back down into your body.

Emergency Measures for Stress, Panic, and Anxiety

Overview

We each have different thresholds of how much energy we can comfortably tolerate. When stressful events or thoughts occur, they can stimulate your sympathetic nervous system, resulting in an adrenalin surge that initiates a flight/flight/or freeze response.

The adrenalin-generated energy can exceed your threshold of comfort. When that happens, that compounds the stress leading possibly to anxiety and even panic. When you are anxious or panicked, you are ungrounded.

Were you to experience an anxiety attack or a panic attack, it's imperative that you do something to ground yourself. This section presents some exercises to help you manage the acuteness of an anxiety attack or panic attack.

Persons suffering from chronic anxiety or frequent panic attacks may benefit from reading the many anxiety coping techniques offered in *The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook* by Edmund J. Bourne. Counseling also may help. Also recommended is your developing a daily grounding practice consisting of some of the other exercises presented in this manual. See for example, Table 1: Suggestions for a Daily Grounding Practice.

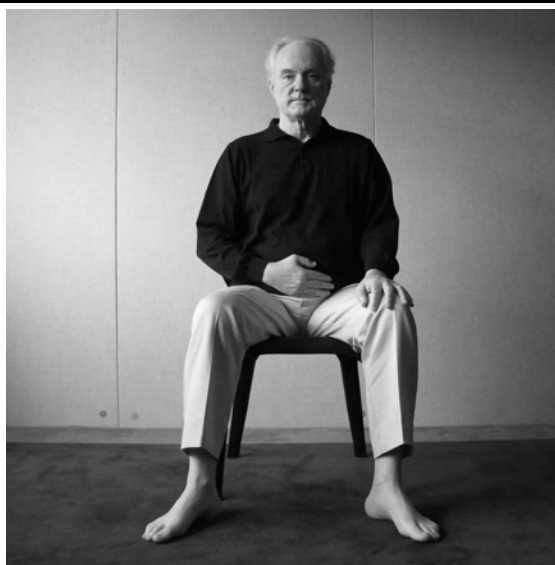
Finally, during periods of excessive stress it helps to avoid stimulants like caffeine (in coffee, black tea, and many soft drinks) and refined sugar.

Exercise 45: Deep Abdominal Breathing

Belly breathing counters anxiety and panic by stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system which results in relaxation.

Directions: Sit with shoulders relaxed, a hand on your belly. Slowly and deeply inhale through your nose. Fill your belly first, then your chest. Then hold your breath for as long as you inhaled. Then exhale for just as long, releasing your chest, then your belly. Repeat at least 10 times or until you are calmed.

As you inhale and exhale into your belly, your hand rise and falls respectively.



Exercise 46: Stomping Your Feet

This exercise directs energy from your head and upper torso to your legs.

Directions: While standing, forcefully stomp your feet, alternating between left and right.

As you stomp, experience the sensations of your legs and feet. Imagine sending energy from the soles of your feet (*yong quan*) into the ground.

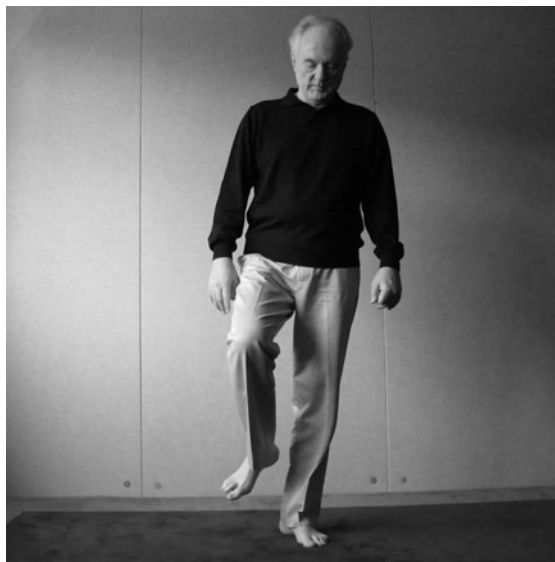


Table 2: More Exercises for Emergency Grounding

In addition to the exercises mentioned in this section, the exercises listed below can help ground you when you feel anxiety or panic.

Five Things	Exercise 49
Shaking Arms & Legs	Exercise 21
Slapping Your Body	Exercise 22
Rolling on the Floor	Exercise 24
Taoist Leg Pump	Exercise 9
Bouncing in Legs	Exercise 10
Jumping Up & Down	Exercise 11
Paired Bouncing in Legs	Exercise 38
Paired Jumping Up & Down	Exercise 39
The Curl (any variation)	Exercise 12,13, 14, 15, or 16

Exercise 47: Taoist Foot Stomp

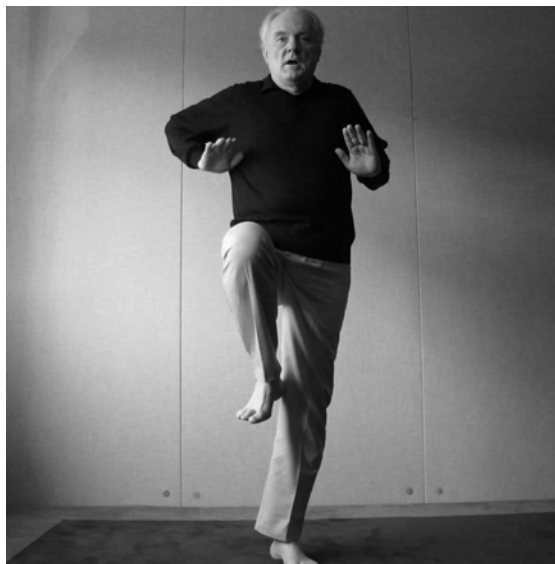
This exercise is a variation of Exercise 46: Stomping Your Feet, and is derived from Taoist qigong practices. This variation adds your voice and your palms (*lao gong*) as ways of discharging excess energy.

Directions: While stomping your feet as in the above exercise, you add two movements.

The first addition involves your arms. Hold your hands at your sides, palms flat, parallel to the floor, fingers pointing forward. As you raise each foot, also raise your hands up towards your armpits. As you stomp a foot, forcefully thrust your palms down. Imagine you were directing energy from the palms' *lao gong* centers into the ground.

The second addition involves your voice. As you thrust down your palms and foot, loudly sound the syllable, "Hu." Source the sound from your belly by quickly contracting your belly as you make the sound. Do not prolong the syllable as if sounding "Huuuuuuuu." Instead sound it shortly and abruptly – and loudly.

Give yourself permission to be loud!



Exercise 48: Discharge Yell

You have learned that a principle of grounding is to reduce your excess energy charge by discharging it from your body through mindful physical activity. Another way of spending the energy is with your voice (as intimated in the Exercise 47: Taoist Foot Stomp).

Directions: Find a place where you can be private. Privacy is important for two reasons: you want to feel uninhibited, and you don't want to concern others.

Yell or scream to give voice to your feelings. Do so repeatedly until you feel relief.

Note that often we feel inhibited. We have been taught to not be loud. Sometimes we are afraid to hear the sound of our own loud voice. So as you do this exercise, explore developing comfort with your increasingly loud voice. Let yourself be loud!

If you are concerned about privacy, you can experiment with yelling into a pillow. Or you may find it easier to do this exercise in a car with windows closed.

Grounding through Awareness

Overview

Each of the previous grounding exercises is meant to be done with attentive awareness of your bodily sensations as you do the exercises. Not only do you do the exercises, but also, and as importantly, you attend to *experiencing* the exercises. Such awareness develops your mind/body integration which counters the ungrounding tendency to be in your head.

The development of mind/body integration need not be limited to experiencing yourself doing physical grounding exercises. You can also develop mind/body integration through awareness practices. Sensory awareness enhances mind/body integration. By directing your awareness from the mind's thoughts to the body's sensations, you can ground yourself in the body and the present moment.

Awareness practices such as Exercise 50: Sensing with Bare Awareness and Exercise 51: Maintaining Presence in Hara are listed solely to inform you of their existence and importance. Others have written volumes about such practices, and a thorough discussion of these practices is beyond the scope of this manual. References are provided for readers who would like to further explore such practices.

Exercise 49: Five Things

Author and teacher, Nancy Napier⁵, cites the Five Things exercise originating with Betty Erickson, the wife of the revolutionary psychiatrist Milton Erickson.

Directions:

Pause, and take several abdominal breaths while you sense your body. Then look around you. See five things. Experience their color and shape. Then touch five things, experiencing their textures. Then listen to five different sounds.

Then see four things, touch four things, and listen to four sounds.

Next do the same with three things each.

Then two things each

Then one thing each.

As you experience these different sensory objects, do so without thought.

Exercise 50: Sensing with Bare Awareness

Whereas the Five Things exercise is an episode of awareness, Sensing with Bare Awareness points to such awareness becoming a way of life, 24/7.

Bare awareness is sensing without the filter of thought. You are sensing an object directly. Typically we experience our senses through a host of pre-conscious and conscious cognitive filters which discriminate and categorize the sense objects. Bare awareness is a sensory awareness similar to seeing something for the very first time... when you really SEE an object for what it is – without thought.

An example is experiencing a sunset. We can simply experience the magnificence of a sunset. Or, we can remove ourselves from the bare experience by exclaim, “Oh, what a beautiful sunset!” or by comparing sunsets or by photographing it, etc.

The Buddha taught bare awareness when he taught, “When seeing there should be only the seen; when hearing there should be only the heard...” - Just the sensory experience without mental commentary or interpretation. Many contemporary teachers teach such bare awareness as a way of life.⁶

Exercise 51: Maintaining Presence in Hara

To “be here now” is not enough. Presence also is needed. Presence is the experience of being here now - and *knowing* that you are here, now.

While awake, each of us is aware. But awareness is not presence. An animal certainly is aware, as are plants. But plants and animals are not present. Their awareness is responsive to their environments, but they are unaware of being aware – they are not conscious.

When just aware, we are metaphorically asleep, on automatic pilot, responding to outer and inner events mind-lessly. When we are in presence, not only are we aware, but also we are mind-full — that is, we experience the here and now consciously, knowingly.

One aspect of fostering presence is to work towards developing a 24/7 awareness of your bodily sensations. A technique for developing this is to root your awareness in your *hara* (see page 17). The practice of sensing your *hara* is beyond the scope of this book. Briefly it can be described as bringing your awareness to your *hara*, and sensing this area of your abdomen at all times. If you are interested in learning more about this practice, see the Bibliography for references.⁷

Exercise 52: Bringing Awareness to Any Exercise, Any Sport

The exercises in this manual are intended to specifically address the cultivation of grounding whether through the development sensory awareness or the loosening of chronic tensions in cartilage, tendons, and muscles that free the body's biophysical energy to course throughout.

Nevertheless it is helpful to remember that any form of exercise can be transformed into a grounding exercise. Whether walking, jogging, playing tennis, cycling, etc., all that is needed is to bring your experiencing awareness to the bodily sensations you experience when exercising. For example, when you walk, see your environs, hear the sounds, feel the sway of your arms and legs. Don't just walk to get somewhere; experience your walking by sensing your bodily sensations as you walk. Similarly, when cycling, experience the sensations of the wind on your face and torso, your hands on the handlebars, the effort of your leg muscles, etc.

Suggestions for Further Study

Many of the world's contemplative, energetic, and somatic practices concern themselves with grounding. These traditions have developed quite sophisticated methods, and their discussion is beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, persons seeking to deepen their experience of grounding are encouraged to explore yoga, *qigong* (*chi gung*), martial arts, and body-oriented psychology practices.

Yoga and qigong practices have developed over several thousand years of energy practice. There are many different types of yoga most of which have nothing whatsoever do to with physical exercise. *Hatha* yoga is the yoga of physical and energetic cultivation which most Westerners associate the word "yoga". *Hatha* yoga practice can develop exquisite mind/body integration. Its postures or *asanas* work not only the muscular and skeletal systems, but also the body's energies.⁸

Qigong (pronounced "chee-gung") is a generic Chinese term referring to a diverse number of energetic practices typically derived from the Taoist contemplative tradition. The word "*qigong*" derives from the Chinese word "qi" (energy) and "gong" ("work with" or "cultivation"). Qigong practitioners exercise to gather *qi* and to manipulate its flow through the body in order to develop the body, mind, and spirit. Of particular interest to persons wanting to further explore grounding would be the standing qigong forms.⁹

Martial arts also cultivate mind/body integration and grounding. There are the external martial arts such as karate which focus upon muscular strength, and there are also internal martial arts such as *tai chi* and *bagua* which focus upon the power of accumulated qi energy.¹⁰

Body-oriented psychology practices promote psychological development through their application of the mind/body unity principle. Commonly we know that the mind can affect the body as in psychosomatic illness. However, if the mind and body are indeed a unity, it follows that working with the body's muscles and energy can in turn affect the mind. Among the many body psychology disciplines represented by the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy (USABP)¹¹ there are Bioenergetics, Core Energetics, and Hakomi, and Radix®.

The bibliography contains several references to yoga, qigong, martial arts texts, and body-oriented psychology practices. Information about these practices and teachers near you may be found on the internet.

Footnotes

1. See Katchmer (1993) for a discussion of the correspondences and differences between the eastern and the western perspectives of biophysical energy.
2. Lowen, A. (1972). *Depression and the body*. New York: Arkana, p. 73.
3. Ibid, p. 70.
4. The occiput is the protruding ridge along the back of the head, above where the spine enters the cranium.
5. See <http://www.nancyjnapier.com>
6. For example, see Tolle (1999), Moss (2007), Krishnamurti (1969), and Hanh,(1990).
7. See Durckheim (1994) and Naranjo (1994).
8. See Iyengar (2001).
9. See Chia (1986) and Chuen (1991).
10. See Frantzis (1998).
11. Information about the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy (USABP) can be found at <http://www.usabp.org/>

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Notes

\$19.95
ISBN 978-0-615-28821-5
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