

The Franklin Method®

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Sally Swift provided us with the 5 basics valuable "tools" with the 4 basics and grounding. With the Franklin Method, I became acquainted with additional "tools" which help me to give my students qualified instruction. I would like to introduce one of the tools here. The Franklin Method is based upon the concept that human life is a mind/body event. Simply put – what you think affects your body and what you do with your body affects your thinking. The Franklin Method teaches you the know-how to make the most out of the body/mind continuum in a practical and hands on manner.

Structural Hygiene according to Mabel Todd (who worked with Sally Swift)

All Structures of the body must return to their original task. All elements of the body are structures: bones, muscles, ligaments, tendons, fasciae, organs, nerves etc.

My Thoughts Regarding Structural Hygiene:

The body works smoothly when all structures perform their tasks. The body is like a team and the different structures are the team members. As long as all team members do their job, the team works well together. This way, the job is fun and no structure has an unnecessary amount of stress. However, if one team member is not reliable, everybody else has to work extra to get the job done. All team members who have to work more start to get stressed out and they lose the pleasure in their work and may even get sick. Our body works in a similar fashion. In reality, we must think about what kind of a creature a human being is, in order to be able to understand structural hygiene.

Humans are Constantly in Motion

Just like thousands of years ago, our body is designed to gather and hunt. In other words, our musculoskeletal system is constructed so it can be challenged all day long. However, nature is efficient and everything we don't use will degenerate. "USE IT OR LOSE IT" All structures in the body need to be stimulated by movement in order to remain or to rebuild themselves. Therefore, exercise during adolescence is very important since the body is building the foundation for a healthy musculoskeletal system in adulthood. Until the age of 5, healthy children who can act out their desire to move, in general have good posture. Then, in kindergarten or school, they have to learn how to sit still. A lot of sitting in front of the TV or computer makes the situation worse. During adulthood, depending on the job we perform, we either require more, but in general mostly less, of our bodies. If humans were animals, one could say that we don't live "species-appropriate". As riding instructors, we normally see our students just once each week. It is difficult to correct bad posture during the limited amount of time we have, especially when the student is not willing to work on it independently as a daily routine. However, horseback riding as a hobby can be motivating to exercise more and stay healthy.

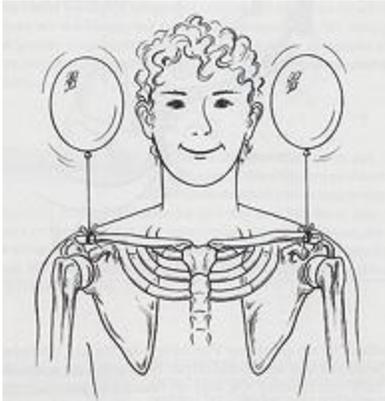
Structural Hygiene for Bones and Muscles

Function of the Bones:

- Support the body and give it form
- Work as levers in motion (arms and legs)
- Act as a suspension device for organs
- Protect the organs (e.g. heart and lungs are protected by the ribs)

Functions of the Muscles:

- Their most important responsibility is to move the bones



With bad posture, the bones do not perform their protective task. In order for the body not to collapse, the muscles must then support the body, which means, they can't perform their original task well anymore, which is to move the bones. As a result the muscles are tense and therefore the joints are less flexible.

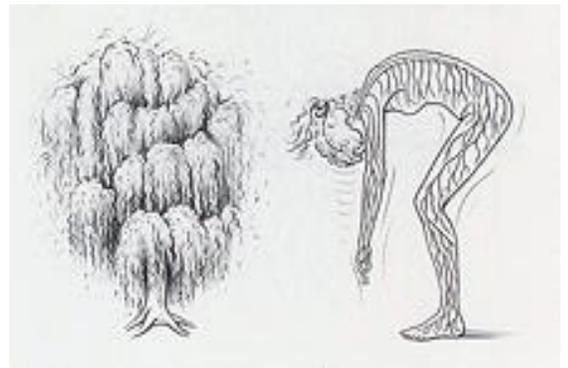
The arms hang, the collarbone is floating. ("Relax your neck, liberate your shoulders" - Eric Franklin)

Structural Hygiene in the Example of the Nervous System.

The somatic nervous system consists of two parts: The motor nervous system and the sensoric nervous system. **The motor nervous system** controls the muscles and is responsible for reaction. I give the horse clear signals with my body. **With the sensoric nervous system** I can perceive my body. I notice how the horse moves under me.

For the body to function perfectly, both parts are equally important. In horseback riders we encounter the "maker" who constantly (often with a lot of strength) influences the horse. In those riders the motor nervous system is predominant, they are barely aware of their bodies and consequently are not sensitive to their horses. However, there is also the other extreme: The rider who gets lost in feeling and almost doesn't dare to influence the horse. In this case structural hygiene means the following: The motor and sensoric nervous system are equally important and only if they work perfectly together, can we ride with feeling as well as with purpose.

Nerves hang like the branches of a willow. ("Think yourself young" Eric Franklin)



Mental and Emotional Impact when Posture is Modified

As Centered Riding instructors we are often very eager to improve the posture of our students and in our enthusiasm to do so, we don't realize that we overburden them.

The body also reflects mental balance. If I as a riding instructor I intend to change the posture of my student abruptly, I unbalance him physically and mentally. Automated movements and posture patterns are stored inside the cerebellum. For instance, I don't have to think about how to move my hand when I brush my teeth, or when to press the clutch, in order to change the gear in my car. The cerebellum is our autopilot and relieves the strain on our cerebrum. These rehearsed actions give us security and self-confidence and are virtually part of our personality. Especially if a student has already been riding for years, the approach must be gentle and I can't ruin everything the student has learned so far.

The Franklin Method refers here to the resource-oriented approach, which means I make a reference to something the student did correctly. I then try to create situations where the student can feel that the new and still unfamiliar posture is going to bring better results, e.g. she feels looser, the horse is more responsive etc. As soon as the student is motivated enough to see the change as a personal challenge, the road to changing her posture is paved.

Here an example from a riding lesson: A student is always a little behind the movement of the horse but her former instructor never corrected the mistake since she thought the problem would solve itself over time. However, the opposite was the case: The student became better and better in leaning back slightly during riding. Though the worst part about it was that the brain memorized this leaning back as the “correct posture“. This student has to retrain the perception of her own body which takes a lot of time and patience. Therefore, structural hygiene also means to give the body enough time to process and accept improvements.

Structural Hygiene for Organs and Skeleton

The organs live inside the skeleton (Eric Franklin)

Figuratively stated, the organs “live“ inside the skeleton. Like good residents, they shouldn't be a burden but maintain and “support“ their home. Both of these body systems are interdependent in order to have a good working relationship. On the one hand, the organs “hang“ inside the skeleton and on the other hand the tension of the organs support the erectness of the skeleton.



Heart and Lungs as an Example

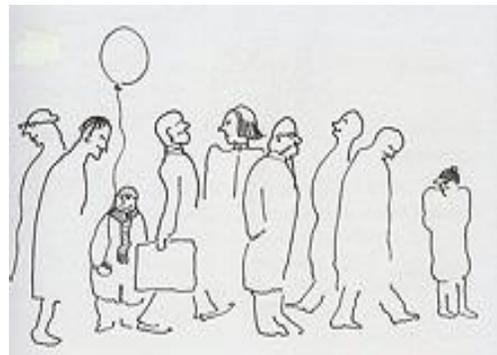
Heart and lungs are under pressure if the posture is caved in. The lungs can't inhale enough air. In addition, the heart and lungs cannot support the erectness of the torso in this posture.

The organs are our “stuffing” and support the skeleton (“To loosen up makes strong” Eric Franklin).

Structural Hygiene in Reality

Everybody has an individual way of moving (“A hundred ideas for movement” Eric Franklin)

We as Centered Riding Instructors are anatomy specialists. We know how the individual parts of the body must work together. Hopefully we will not let ourselves be influenced by the “ideal rider/horse image“, because not every rider has ideal proportions and in addition, he often does not own the horse that would match his body type. People with long torsos and short legs sometimes ride chubby horses or some riders have long legs and ride very slim horses etc. In some cases riders are handicapped because of an accident or illness. It is our responsibility to find the best possible solution for each horse/rider pair.



For example, a student with short arms and long torso:

She carries her hands higher than other riders. The instructor demands that she should carry her hands six inches above the withers. The result: She has to extend her arms so her shoulders come forward. She then needs to use unnecessary muscular strength in her shoulders and neck. Heart and lungs are compressed and breathing is constricted.

The muscles must support the bones and shoulders, so the elbow joints are no longer as flexible as they should be. Thus, the hand cannot follow the head of the horse well anymore. She loses her power position and her shoulders start to hurt. The result is a negative chain reaction throughout the entire body and naturally it has negative impact on the horse as well.

My most important realization

I always need to have a dialog with the student since he is the expert regarding his body and only he can feel his own body. At best, I can advise him on the ways to use his body in a more useful manner.