The Alexander Technique - Lying in Semi-Supine

By taking the time to lie down in the semi-supine position, you are allowing gravity to assist you in releasing, spreading out and expanding rather than our usual habits of contracting and compressing ourselves. It is a position of mechanical advantage which provides maximum support and relief for the head, neck and back.

How long and when should I lie down?

It is extremely beneficial to do lying down work at least once each day for 10 to 20 minutes in any one period. Even two minutes would make a difference though, if you are short of time. Lying down for more than 20 minutes will not necessarily be damaging but it is less likely that we will keep up the conscious directing, that it is a core aspect of the Alexander Technique, as time increases! You can lie down any time of day and I would suggest that you find times to suit you.
The following notes might be helpful:

- Lying down in the morning after one has got up can help even out the stresses and tensions that we have built up during our sleep.
- Lying down in the day, for example after lunch can make a break from being upright (sitting, standing, walking etc.) from morning until night.
- Lying down before going to bed can help release stresses and contribute to a better sleep.
- It can be very valuable to lie down prior to and/or after giving a presentation or performance, or any activity that may be stress-inducing.

**What should I lie on?**

Always lie down on a firm surface for example on a carpeted floor. A soft surface like a bed is not firm enough and will not give the same result.

**How high should the books under my head be?**

Your Alexander Technique teacher will advise you on the optimum height of books for you – the height should neither allow your head to drop forward and down into your throat or back and down. The face should be more or less parallel to the floor. Note that this optimum height varies from person to person, and may change as the conditions of your musculature and structure change through the process of having lessons and gradually working on yourself. *Beware of books which state the exact height for you, without having seen you.*

**How should I arrange my legs?**

By having the legs bent and the feet flat on the floor (rather than your legs out straight), it takes the pressure off the lower back. Have your feet neither too far or too close to your torso (an angle of approximately 80 degrees at your knees) and with your feet approximately shoulder width apart.

However, at first, a variation which may help in being able to release in the hip joints is to have pillows or cushions supporting your legs underneath the knees. In this way, you do not have to keep the legs up and will be not be concerned about the legs falling and sustaining a groin injury!

**How should I arrange my arms?**

You can arrange your arms either lying straight by you side palms down, or with your elbows bent and with your palms resting on your tummy.
**Should I try and get comfortable?**

Apart from making initial adjustments when you first lie down, avoid fidgeting or wriggling around to ‘get comfortable’ as what ‘feels right’ will be what corresponds to our habit. Allow yourself to release, letting the firm surface support you. As you release, you may ‘feel wrong’ or uncomfortable but this may be a more beneficial state than your habitual state that feels right! As you are lying down, gravity will be assisting your back to lengthen and widen whilst ‘undoing’ unnecessary twists and tensions.

**How do I direct myself?**

When lying down consciously direct yourself in the sequence that you learned during your lessons. This reflects Alexander’s discovery of the Primary Control (the relationship between the head neck and back).

- Let the neck be free
- To let your head release at the top of your spine away from the body
- To let your whole back lengthen and widen, not holding your chest (not fixing the ribcage), diaphragm, tummy or pelvis – undoing the “muscular corseting” that we tend to do.
- To let your shoulders release away from each other and continue allowing release from your shoulders to your elbows, from your elbows to your wrists and from your wrists to the tips of your fingers and thumbs, letting your hands spread out.
- To let your hips be free so that your knees can release away from your back and let your feet spread out on the floor.
- It is good to have your eyes open and be aware of what is going on around you, so that gradually you can direct yourself in other activities.

**How do I get up?**

Get up slowly by rolling over onto your side whilst avoiding pulling your head back; move into a kneeling position and slowly stand up. If you feel at all light headed, do take your time and have a drink of water. Having said take your time, do avoid being ‘over careful’ – which can simply be another way of tensing ourselves up.