

Rolling on the back

When I'm grumpy, when my back hurts, when my mind is not clear, when I cannot get going – I often lie on the floor and do a Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement (ATM) lesson involving rolling. It cheers me up and it clears my mind. I love rolling on the floor. When it came to recording a lesson for the International Feldenkrais Week, rolling on the back was an easy choice.

You may be wondering: What is so attractive to me about rolling on the floor? What is changing in me when I am rolling? How can rolling have such a powerful effect?

Rolling on the floor is relaxing, calming and soothing

Feldenkrais lessons slow us down and bring us into a state of mindfulness. Gentle rocking and rolling have been shown to synchronize our brain waves and to promote sleep. We are programmed to respond to rocking - we have been rocking babies to sleep for millennia. It relaxes us and makes us less anxious. Relaxed, we can more easily pay attention to fine differences in our movements – what is smooth and what jars. We can discover the habitual patterns that we have taken for granted, and explore whether they still serve us well. Gentle rolling evokes the calm to observe ourselves and reflect.

Rolling on the floor improves our ability to move

Feldenkrais lessons that improve our ability to roll bring us huge benefits. So many things have to fall into place for rolling to be smooth and easy: coordinating the activities of different muscles, coordinating the movements of our limbs and our core, dealing with gravity, keeping our balance and timing. In human developmental terms, rolling is the foundation for much of what comes later. As babies we must first learn to roll, and only then do we learn to crawl, then walk, then run and then jump. Going back to the 'basics' and revisiting this particular stage of our development allows us to explore patterns of posture and movement that we have acquired unconsciously over our lives. Feldenkrais lessons give us a chance to recognize our habits, some of which may be inefficient or still be compensating for a long-healed injury. We can reclaim the joy and ease of movement we had as babies, and cherish this throughout our adult lives.

Rolling on the floor is joyful and empowering

Feldenkrais lessons on rolling recreate our earliest experiences of independent movement and the pleasure of exploring our surroundings. Nobody said: "You can't do this" or "you're doing it wrong". As babies, we wouldn't have understood (and probably wouldn't have taken any notice had we understood). We experimented and discovered how to shift our weight and turn ourselves to get what we wanted, to move towards the bright toy that was lying just out of reach. Curiosity made us venture into the unknown, and our worlds opened up as we became less dependent on others to move us and to turn us. As babies, we just playfully found out what works and what doesn't work. And, after trying this and that a few times, we stopped and rested for a while.... just as we do in a Feldenkrais lesson.



While rolling in a Feldenkrais way, we reconnect to those forgotten, but still intuitively familiar, urges and instinctive movements that helped us to explore our world and to find new freedom and new possibilities. With every success we grew in confidence.

As adults we hardly roll on the floor anymore. We do not need to – walking is far more efficient. But, are we missing out on a simple pleasure and the opportunity to improve the foundations of many everyday movements? Perhaps I've changed your view of rolling. If I have, give it a try. 😊

