

Somatic Movement Therapy: For a Healthy Immune System

By Simon Yu, MD and Mary Francis Hoffman, RSMT, CHTP, RYT

What is Somatic Movement Therapy? Mary Francis, Somatic Movement Therapist, has been with my practice for over seven years. Still, I'm not so sure how to explain somatic movement therapy. It's like Healing Touch with the addition of re-educating the neuromuscular system and re-training breathing toward greater health and well being, or something like that.

I decided to ask Mary Francis to explain it. After all, she is Nationally Certified as both a Registered Somatic Movement Therapist and a Somatic Educator. She is also pursuing a doctorate degree in Transpersonal Psychology with a specialization in Health and Wellness.

Mary Francis states, "Somatic Movement Therapy (SMT) opens the pathways in the body. SMT heightens vitality and sensory awareness through the integration of body and mind with movement. SMT is an umbrella term for several distinct disciplines. The foundation for this field was developed by F. Mathias Alexander, Ida Rolf, Joseph Pilates, Moshe Feldenkrais and Rudolph von Laban who developed their own individual techniques. Somatic became the recognized term for techniques and approaches which focus on the individual developing and deepening a sense of the self within the body."

When you are under stress, your immediate response is holding your breath, tighten your jaw, breathing shallow, all muscles are tightened and ready to strike, scream or run. Modern men and women are under a constant stress to support their families. They are in a constant mode of the survival pattern of fight-or-flight, even when they are sleeping. No wonder pharmaceutical companies are busy selling medications to calm the nerves, suppress pain, artificially raise one's mood and chemically induce a sleep!

Mary Francis, also certified in Healing Touch, believes there are better ways to deal with the effects of stress. Somatic Movement Therapy includes simple exercises including stretching, breathing, and gentle hands-on "energetic touch" with manipulation techniques to release the inflammation of tight muscles and joints. This therapy promotes lymphatic drainage, increases circulation, supports adrenal function and promotes emotional release.

For Mary Francis, being very sick herself and going through natural healing, provided a natural incentive for her to pursue an education in alternative healing therapy. She uses five elements of a dynamic health model: breathing, sound, movement, touch and stillness. SMT has been applied successfully for conditions of anxiety, depression, persistent headache, jaw pain, hypertension, arthritis, adrenal exhaustion, fibromyalgia, joint pain and back pain.

After I spent some time with her, listened to her explanations of somatic movement and read some of her patients' testimonials, I'm reminded I have a gifted practitioner under my roof. I believe her skills with Somatic Movement Therapy haven't yet been duly recognized in the St. Louis area. Mary Francis also teaches yoga for flexibility and strength.

Now, you and I both know a little more about Somatic Movement Therapy. To continue your learning, see Mary Francis' web site at www.body-mindlife.com.

Dr. Simon Yu, M.D. is a Board Certified Internist. He practices Internal Medicine with an emphasis on Alternative Medicine to use the best each has to offer. For more articles and information about alternative medicine as well as patient success stories visit his web site at

www.preventionandhealing.com or call Prevention and Healing, Inc., 314-432-7802. You can also attend a free monthly presentation and discussion by Dr. Yu on Alternative Medicine at his office on the second Tuesday each month at 6:30 pm. Please call to verify the date and reserve your space.



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