

# Good Practice Technique for Vocalists

## Tips for Preventing Injury based on The Alexander Technique

When practising singing, it's important to release excess tension that might cause pain or even injury to the vocal cords and the rest of the body. Practising is a repetitive activity and any misuse of the body when repeated over and over again is likely to get worse. By setting up good practice habits you can avoid future voice problems as well as unwanted muscle tension in the neck, shoulders and the rest of the body. Afterall, prevention is better than cure - and it's a lot less painful!

### What is The Alexander Technique?

The Alexander Technique is a self-help programme not a therapy. The good news is you don't have to learn anything new - the body knows what to do, but we get in the way with our habits. The Alexander Technique teaches you to become more aware of your habits and then 'undo' them through your thinking. By thinking about how you carry out any activity, including singing, you can reduce unnecessary tension held in the body - most often it's tension you're not even aware of. The Alexander Technique helps you to learn to use your body in a more balanced and co-ordinated way and can thereby improve your practice and performance.

### Keeping your Neck Free is Crucial

The founder of the Alexander Technique, F.M. Alexander, discovered that there is a very important relationship between the head, the neck and the back. Disturbing the balance between them causes problems not only in the neck, but in the rest of the body too. This is crucial for vocalists because of their general tendency to throw the head back when singing.

Your head weighs more than 10 lbs (approx. 5 kilos) - that's like trying to balance 10 bags of sugar on top of your spine where your head is! If your head isn't balanced on the top of your spine, it's putting over 10 pounds of unwanted pressure on your neck muscles! It's the big muscles at the back of the neck that balance your head on your spine. If you are holding too much tension in these muscles, they will shorten and pull your head backwards and off balance. How can you tell if you are doing this? Sit in front of a mirror and check if you are looking straight ahead and that your eyes are level. Does this feel like where your head is normally? Now try singing in front of the mirror while looking straight ahead. Did you automatically want to throw your head back? Something that will help you to free the muscles in your neck is lying down in what we call the 'semi-supine position'. See details overleaf.

### Your Practice Routine

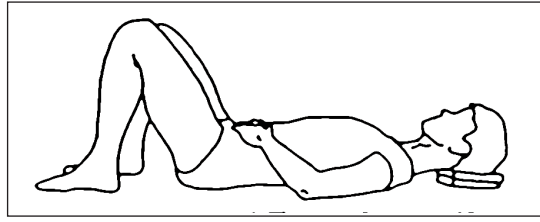
Before practising, lie in semi-supine (see overleaf) - if time is tight even 2 minutes will help you. Try singing while lying in this position. It will make you more aware of what you are doing with your head/neck when you sing.

The following tips are designed to make your practising as trouble-free as possible:

- ✓ To start your practice session, stand quietly for a moment, pause and check yourself out - remember you can change anything just by thinking it:-
  - Is your neck feeling free?
  - Are you allowing your jaw to soften?
  - Have you softened fingers, hands, wrists, elbows, ampits, shoulders?  
(particularly when holding a mic)
  - Are you releasing up the front of the body from the hip joints all the way up to the throat?
  - Are you widening across the chest from shoulder to shoulder?
  - Are you really allowing your feet to rest by softening them onto the floor?
  - Is approx. 60% of your body weight back on your heels? (keep softening the heels as you do this)
  - have you softened the behind the knees? (i.e. they're not braced back)
- ✓ Take frequent mini-breaks of 1 or 2 minutes - get up, walk around, drink some water

For more information about The Alexander Technique  
or to book a lesson on-site at The Institute,  
contact Jane Gregory, tel. 07951 221163

# Semi-Supine as Part of The Alexander Technique



The Semi-supine position

**Great benefit can be derived from spending 10 or 15 minutes each day lying down in what is called in The Alexander Technique, 'Semi-supine' or 'Lying Down Work'. This is the most trustworthy position you can put yourself in, to bring about optimum length in your spine.**

## The Semi-supine Position

Lie on your back on a carpeted surface with knees bent and hands resting on your abdomen (just below your ribs, hands not touching each other). Your feet should be far enough apart to allow the legs to balance with minimum effort while your knees are pointing to the ceiling.

Rest your head on a small pile of books (cover the books with a face flannel if you feel this surface is too hard). The height of the books varies from person to person but should be sufficient to avoid the neck arching backwards. If in doubt have more height rather than less. See illustration above.

## The Weight-bearing Points

Think about your weight being evenly distributed between:

- ✓ The back of your head
- ✓ Your shoulder blades
- ✓ Your lower back (just below your waist)
- ✓ Your feet

## Giving Your Directions

While you are lying in semi-supine, you can think about the following directions. It is very important that you don't try to 'do' them - just use your thinking to bring about the changes.

- ✓ Think about the weight-bearing points and allow your whole body to release onto the floor
- ✓ Tell yourself that your head is supported by the books, therefore your neck can be really free
- ✓ Imagine your back widening and releasing onto the floor
- ✓ Think about your knees pointing up to the ceiling

Keep going around these directions with your thinking and see what you can observe or notice about yourself while lying down.

## The Benefits of Semi-supine

Along with releasing tension from the body, when you consciously apply your thinking to the process, you are practising better use of your body. Then when you get up, you can try to maintain the improved use of yourself as you go about your daily tasks. As a musician, a few minutes of semi-supine before practising will make you more aware while you're playing of whether you are holding excess tension anywhere in the body.