



SOMATICS WORKSHOP



WHAT IS SOMATIC MOVEMENT

Somatic movement is a mindful approach to movement that emphasizes the **internal experience** of the body rather than external appearance or performance.

By focusing on the internal experience, somatic movement can help identify and release chronic muscular tension patterns often held in the body due to injury, trauma, or habitual movement patterns.

WHY SOMATICS IS DIFFERENT THAN STRETCHING

Somatic movement isn't about stretching deeper or getting stronger. We don't force the body to change—we teach it to remember.

Instead of stretching tight muscles, we use a natural process called **pandiculation**—a gentle contract–release–reset that re-educates the brain and helps muscles truly let go. Simply put, stretching pulls on muscles, pandiculation teaches the body to soften from within.

SENSORY MOTOR AMNESIA

Sensory Motor Amnesia (SMA) is when your body forgets how to feel and control certain muscles. .

When we feel stress or pressure to get things done—like meeting deadlines or taking care of family needs, our muscles hold tension. **Chronic stress** causes them to tense—and they stay that way, limiting movement and causing pain.

Many cases of muscular pain—sciatica, scoliosis, frozen shoulder, uneven leg length or plantar fasciitis—are viewed by most doctors as structural problems. However, Somatic practitioners view these conditions as functional problems that can be treated by improving the sensory motor system.

The good news is that SMA is learned through habituation, which means it can be unlearned by practicing a new way of sensing and moving.

Today we will discuss exercises to address three stress reflex holding patterns and exercises to unwind them.



THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE

Our posture tells our story. The way we stand and move reflects how our bodies hold stress, emotion, and trauma. When we unconsciously hold tension, it can lead to pain, restriction, and disconnection.

Trauma isn't just something that happens to us—it's something that happens inside us, especially in the nervous system.

The **effects of trauma** often linger long after the event, showing up as **chronic tension, numbness, hypervigilance, or emotional shutdown**.

Somatic practices offer a path back to safety, agency, and presence—allowing the body to complete stress responses and return to its natural rhythm, helping us to move with more ease and less pain.

In today's workshop, we'll explore the **Red Light Reflex, Green Light Reflex, and Trauma Reflex**—how these patterns show up in our posture, movement, and everyday function, and simple exercises to rewire the brain and calm the nervous system.

THE GREEN LIGHT REFLEX

The Green Light Reflex is an automatic brain response triggered whenever you're called to action. It engages the large muscles of the back that move you forward—whether you're walking, running, standing, or simply pushing through your day to “get things done.”



When these muscles become overly contracted, they pull the back into an exaggerated arch—**like a soldier standing at attention**.

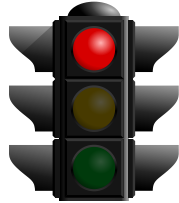
Every time you rush to catch a train, sit at a computer, lift a child, or stand for long hours, these muscles are activated.

But when the reflex becomes chronic, it can lead to issues like:

- **Herniated discs**
- **Neck and shoulder pain**
- **Sciatica**

Somatic movement helps interrupt this pattern, restoring balance and ease to your posture and movement.

THE RED LIGHT REFLEX



THE TRAUMA REFLEX



The Red Light Reflex involves the muscles on the front of the body tightening and pulling you inward—leading to rounded shoulders, a collapsed chest, and the head jutting forward.

This protective, slumping reflex is a universal response to fear, anxiety, prolonged stress, or negativity. Even a sudden loud noise can trigger this inward contraction as the body instinctively guards itself.

When this reflex becomes chronic, it can contribute to:

- **Chronic neck pain**
- **Jaw tension or TMJ**
- **Kyphosis**
- **Hip and mid-back pain**
- **Shallow breathing**

Somatic movement helps release this pattern and restore upright, effortless posture.

The Trauma Reflex involves the muscles of the trunk, which contract to hike one hip and rotate the spine slightly. It's the body's way of compensating for pain, imbalance, or injury—often without our awareness.

Common triggers include:

- **Limping after a twisted ankle**
- **Carrying a child on one hip**
- **Recovering from surgery (ie. appendicitis)**
- **Slips or falls**

This reflex shows up as subtle (or not-so-subtle) side-bending and twisting through the pelvis, torso, shoulders, and head. Imagine walking like a car with one flat tire—compensating just to keep going.

Over time, this pattern can lead to pain, imbalance, and restricted movement. Somatic work helps unwind this reflex and restore symmetry, coordination, and connection.

When we experience something overwhelming—physically or emotionally—the body shifts into survival mode. If the stress response isn't completed, the nervous system can get stuck, and the body "remembers," continuing to react as if the danger is still present, even years later.

IMPORTANT: Always begin your session with a “Soma scan in the sand” to become aware of your body and breath. Slow your breath, elongating the exhale. Use the same focus and breath in exercises. Repeat scan between exercises.



✓ Arch & Flatten with details

Arch & Flatten allows us to release and relax all the extensor muscles of the spine. They tend to get stiff and tight in response to stress. These are involved in the Green Light Reflex.

When they are tight they can make your neck, back and shoulders feel sore. By adding a few details and attention to the movement of the head and/or the rib cage we can modify our Arch & Flatten to make it even more effective for releasing tension in our neck and shoulders.

1. Paraspinals (spinal extensors)



✓ Flower (Startle Reflex)

Flower allows us to release and relax all the flexor muscles of the trunk AND all the muscles of adduction and internal rotation.

These muscles contract in response to fear, anxiety and worry. They pull your head and shoulders forward distorting your posture.

This movement directly addresses the Red Light Reflex (aka Startle Reflex)

As well as making your neck and shoulders feel great, this movement also reduces feelings of anxiety and will vastly improve your breathing and posture!

1. Trapezius

2. Pectorals

3. Abdominals

4. Adductors



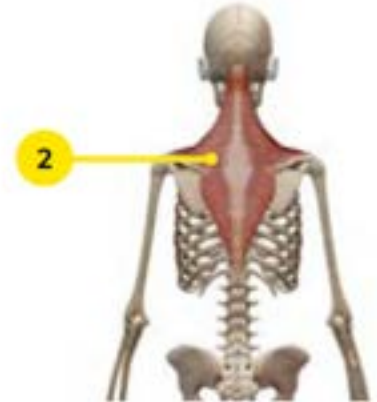
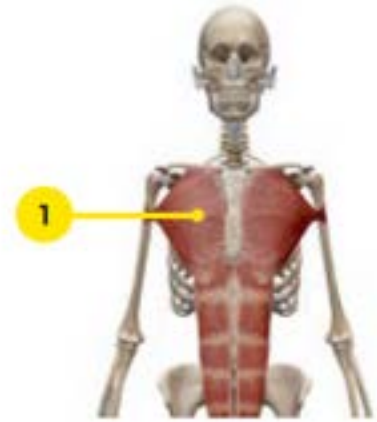


Arch & Curl

Back to basics with Arch & Curl. Whilst Arch & Curl is predominantly about the belly (curling) and back (arching) muscles. We can make it more neck and shoulder focussed simply by being more intentional about the movement of the shoulders and arms when we practice it.

Arch & Curl addresses both the Red Light and Green Light Reflexes.

1. Pectorals (elbows in)
2. Trapezius (elbows out)

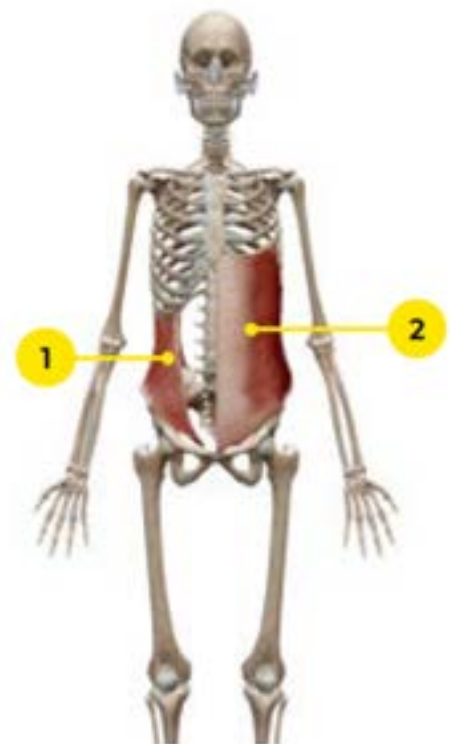


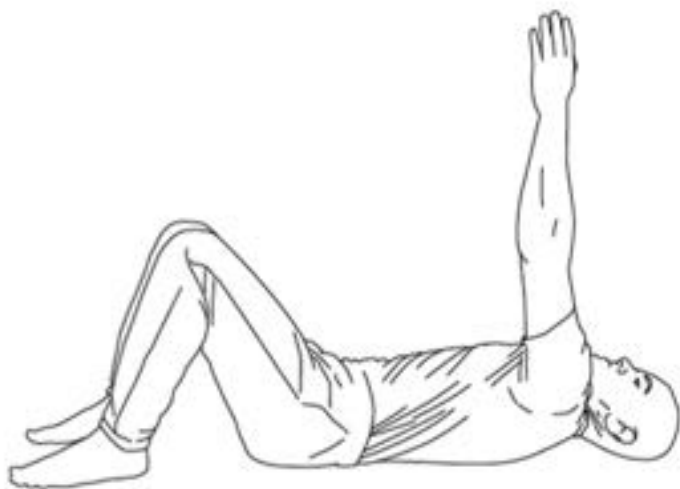
Zig Zag Shoulders

Zig Zag Shoulders pandiculates all the muscles that shrug/lift and depress/lower your shoulders. They also address your waist muscles (obliques) and even your neck! Practicing this fun movement will help you keep your shoulders comfortable, level and balanced.

This movement addresses the Trauma Reflex because it involves your waist/sides of your trunk.

1. Internal Obliques
2. External Obliques

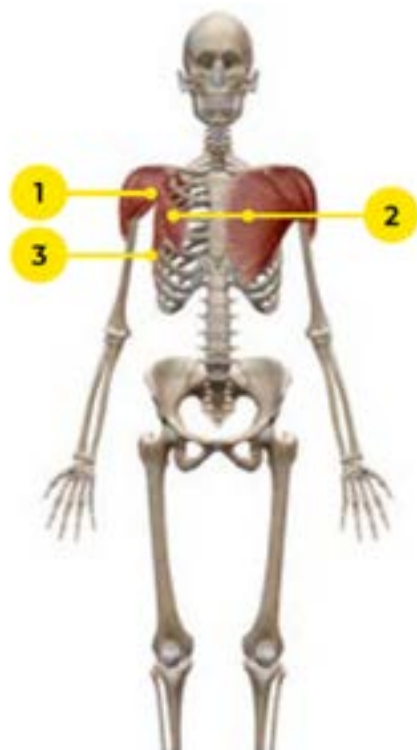




Pulling Rope

Pulling Rope is an amazingly simple and effective Somatic movement. It will quickly release and relax all the muscles that draw your shoulders forward. Great if you've been sitting at a desk or driving for long hours.

1. Anterior Deltoids
2. Pectorals
3. Serratus Anterior

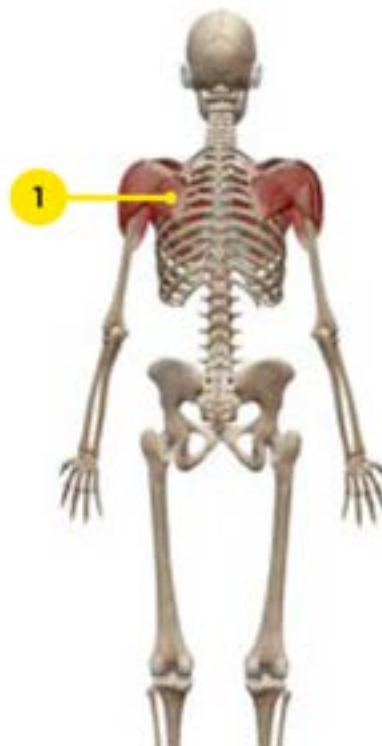


Arm Twist & Reach

This one adds a literal twist to the Pulling Rope movement. This allows you to pandiculate your rotator cuff muscles in addition to all the muscles addressed by Pulling Rope above.

Relaxed rotator cuff muscles make twisting your arms feel much easier.

1. Rotator cuff



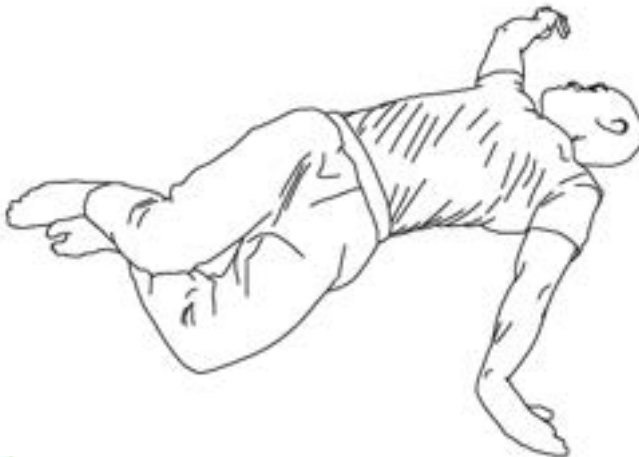
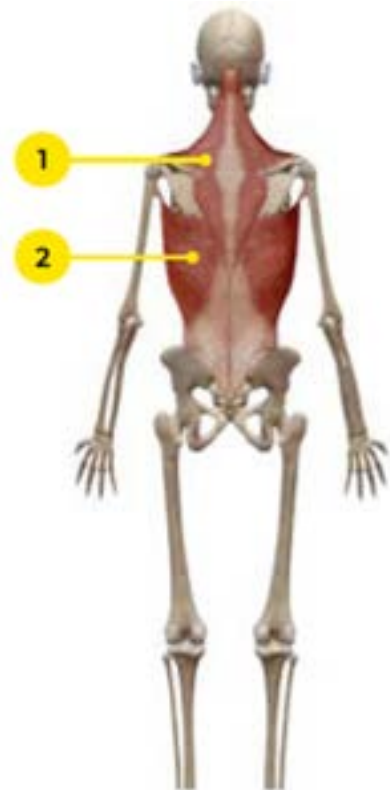


✓ **W-Y Arms**

W-Y Arms allows you to release the major muscles of the back of the shoulder, namely your trapezius and your latissimus dorsi.

Relaxed lats and traps make for a comfortable neck and back and arms that can move freely.

1. Trapezius
2. Latissimus Dorsi



✓ **Washrag**

Washrag allows us to feel our entire body twisting freely. Neck, shoulders, trunk, hips and legs all working together just as they are supposed to!

Want to focus on just your neck and shoulders? No problem. Just allow your legs to be still in the bent position as you twist your arms and turn your head.

When your neck and shoulders feel suitably free, add the twisting of the hips and legs back in.

Enjoy the feeling of your relaxed comfortable body!





Hip Lift & Reach

Hip Lift & Reach is a great full body pandiculation that also helps you to integrate the movements of your back, neck, shoulder and arms with the rest of your body.

Make it feel good, like a big juicy yawn!



RESOURCES

LEARN SOMATICS

<https://learnsomatics.ie>

ESSENTIAL SOMATICS

<https://essentialsomatics.com>

SOMATIC MOVEMENT CENTER

<https://somaticmovementcenter.com>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnaliyeGz90>

