

Transformation

From Sympathetic to Parasympathetic



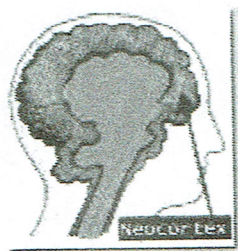
Recent brain imaging research has begun to demonstrate that anxiety is a brain killer--the more anxiety a person experiences, the less effectively our brains operate. It is becoming increasingly apparent that professional and personal effectiveness requires self-regulation skills. By relaxing the muscles of the pelvic region (i.e., kegel, sphincter, and psoas), we are able to affect profound systemic muscle relaxation. This relaxation facilitates a shift in the autonomous nervous system from the *sympathetic* system (i.e., fight-or-flight reflex utilized during periods of perceived threat) to the *parasympathetic* system (i.e., relaxation and optimal functioning utilized during period of safety). By maintaining this pelvic relaxation, we are able to thwart the autonomous nervous system from shifting to sympathetic dominance each time we perceive even the mildest threats (i.e. criticism).

By practicing the release and relaxation of these muscles, we can gradually shift from sympathetic to parasympathetic dominance. The rewards of this transformation include comfort in our bodies, maximal motor and cognitive functioning, ability to tolerate intimacy, self-regulation, internal vs. external locus of control, ability to remain mission/principle driven, increased tolerance, increased effectiveness, and increased health of our body's systems.

What happens when my sympathetic nervous system is dominant?

When you perceive a threat, your body responds to either neutralize or move away from this perceived threat. This is true for all species of living things and is known as the "fight or flight reflex." If we are truly in danger of losing our lives, then this reflex is arguable useful.

However, we are rarely confronted with threats and circumstances that are this dire in our daily lives. Instead, we perceive some mild threat and our sympathetic nervous systems activates and we find ourselves trying to either kill or run away from our boss, co-worker, or spouse. This over-active and very sensitive threat identification and early warning system is the cause of all stress.



When our sympathetic nervous system is activated and dominant, we are preparing for battle or flight. Our circulation becomes constricted, heart rate increases, and our muscles become tense and ready to act. Inside our brains, the neocortex becomes less functional while the brain stem, basil ganglia, and thalamus become more active. This is because the perceived need to survive has superseded all other brain functioning. As we become more “stressed” and the longer we are in this state of sympathetic dominance, the more likely we are to compromise the functioning of higher order brain systems such as language, speech, motor activity, filtering, and compassion. This loss of functioning may partially account for why people have trouble thinking logically during “stressful” times, or why they have trouble being kind when they perceive threat, or even why they have trouble with peak physical performance (i.e., sports) when they are “nervous.” By simply relaxing and keeping relaxed our pelvic muscles we can reverse this process of sympathetic dominance and return to parasympathetic systems. This return to parasympathetic dominance will allow the individual to regain optimal functioning of speech, language (remember intentional thought is simply talking to ourselves—something for which we need to be able to create language and speech), motor coordination, filtering, and compassion. Once the individual has been able to successfully transition from sympathetic to parasympathetic dominance, without external agents (i.e., drugs) and without regard for the external events (i.e., crises) then the individual has become self-regulatory. A person who becomes skilled in making this transition has developed an internal locus of control and is no longer a victim of circumstances.

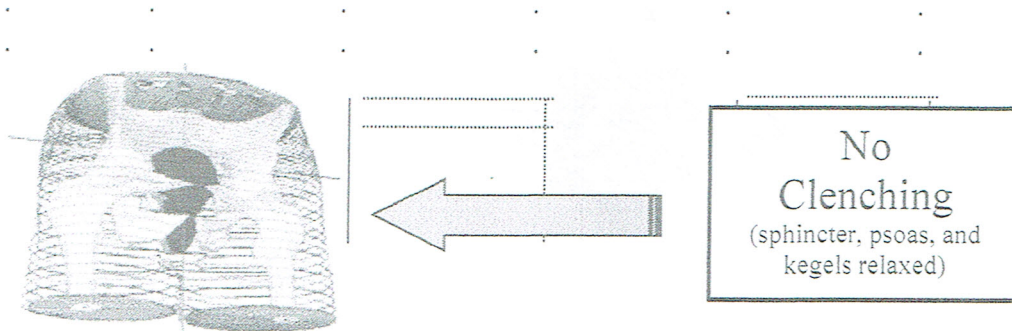
Where are the Pelvic Muscles? How do I find them?

While conducting seminars students often ask me this question. I cannot help but to feel a twinge of sadness when this question is asked. The sadness comes from the awareness that the person asking this question has learned to be unaware of these muscles. People who are not aware of the muscles in their mid-body are not aware for good reason—it has been a coping strategy since childhood. Children who grew up in anxious and dangerous environments

learned to keep their bodies tight in anticipation of danger. With no skills for self-regulating, these children often learn to numb and dissociate their awareness away from the pain in their bodies. These children grow into adults that have difficulty being “in” their bodies—difficulty in monitoring and regulating muscle tension and, ultimately, anxiety¹.

EXERCISE:

1. While sitting, put your hands under your butt.
2. Feel the two pointed bones upon which you are sitting .
3. Now, touch the two bony points on your right and left side just below the waist.
4. You have made a touch memory for four distinct points. Connect those four points to make a square.
5. Now, allow your breath to get to the area in the middle of the square. Also, allow the square to expand.
6. Release and relax all muscles that traverse the area of the square so that there are NO CLENCHED muscles in the square.



What now the my Pelvic Muscles are relaxed?

Simple, keep them that way. If you are able to keep your pelvic muscles released and relaxed for 20 – 30 seconds then you will begin to notice the clear differences in yourself as you transition from sympathetic to parasympathetic dominance. You will first notice comfort in your body. As you release the tension and stress that you yourself have been generating you will become aware that your body is comfortable—no matter what is going on around you. Your thoughts may still be racing and producing warning messages. If this is happening, DO NOTHING; just concentrate on keeping your pelvic muscles relaxed. This will be difficult for many people because since childhood we have taken action when we experience this alarm. However, if we are able to keep our pelvic muscles relaxed then we will be rewarded with a lessening of “stress” and the restoration of optimal functioning in our thinking and actions.

¹ Note - For the person who is unable to locate their pelvic muscles, I suggest that they visit a massage therapist and ask the therapist for assistance in locating and releasing their pelvic muscles. This use of therapeutic touch will help to make the abstract concrete.

With this self-regulation, we will be able to comfortably seek creative solutions to problems and situations that used to leave us baffled, exhausted, and frustrated.

By developing and practicing the skills of self-regulation we will find ourselves able to maintain fidelity to our intention--our mission. We will find that we no longer need to react to every little crisis as though it is a life-or-death situation. We will become free from our pasts to live for ourselves the lives that we create without having to be perpetually "on guard" for the next danger. We will be able to function at peak effectiveness anytime we choose—a transformation indeed.

Sympathetic = Reactive = Stress = Diminished Functioning= No Choice

Parasympathetic = Intentional = Comfort = Optimal Functioning = Choice

