

Movement by Pattern

By Claudia Stahl
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Judith Aston has always been an abstract thinker. As a child she noticed when images in artwork were not proportional. She even played patterning games with herself as she looked out the window in the back seat of the family car; if she passed three white houses and a gray house, what color would the next one be?

Aston's gifts of reasoning and observing how systems like the body work evolved into a therapeutic movement technique that has enabled people to move more freely and comfortably.

Aston studied dance at UCLA, taught dance and movement, and studied under Dr. Ida Rolf in the 1960s.

Aston Patterning is an educational system that includes bodywork, movement education, ergonomics and fitness. It totals 33 weeks of training. The first two weeks are taught in two-part workshops. Participants learn to "see" the whole body in standing balance, evaluate tissue tensions, using three-dimensional touch and to use the body more efficiently. By the end of the workshops, they have lost the stiff-

ness that Aston perceives of conventional ideas of proper posture.

Aston developed her approach to complement the body's asymmetry. The result is a unique biodynamics and approach to ergonomics.

"I have never met a body or mind that is symmetrical," she said. "The body is nonlinear, so there has to be a nonlinear approach to movement."

Most who flock to Aston's workshops—among them athletic trainers and occupational and physical therapists—have to de-program themselves of seeing the body in terms of components. The Aston technique emphasizes the relationships among body parts. The goal of working out a frozen shoulder, for example, becomes a quest to train the whole body to move more efficiently and in its unique, natural pattern.

Caregivers who use the Aston Movement technique would first ask patients about their history, including experiences which may have had an impact on the way they currently move, as well as their current physical activities. Next, they ask their clients to perform simple movements, such as walking, bending, sitting or standing, as well as more specific Aston movements that reveal postural alignment and tension-holding patterns.



Aston's techniques might help patients to move more freely in all environments, including the workplace. (photo by Lucien Capehart Photography)

Overall, Aston Movement is about teaching the body's segments to complement each other. A stroke patient with involvement on the right side, for instance, would concentrate on teaching the left side to compensate and boost function.

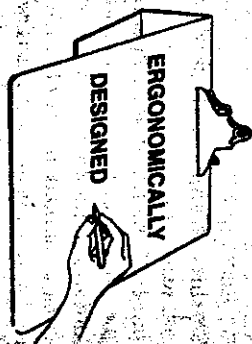
Aston recently called upon her techniques to rehabilitate herself after a serious skiing accident, which left her temporarily wheelchair-bound and dependent on crutches.

"I had good orthopedists, but I really did it through patterning. I worked on my right leg a little at a time. Now I don't even have a limp. My doctors always thought I would have much greater limitation than I do," she said.

• Judith Aston's workshops are offered through the Upledger Institute. For more information, call 800-233-5880.

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