**Path of least resistance**

**Welcome to session 3**

Have you have ever manoeuvred a shopping-trolley with one stuck wheel and one aimlessly pivoting? If so, then you probably understand the frustration and effort required to propel forwards against added resistance. Living with complex chronic illness can sometimes feel similarly awkward. Fortunately, just as oil and a screwdriver can regularly help tune up a trolley’s wheel action, we can subtly adjust our own movement qualities and energy efficiency by using a few handy tools. Here are several possibilities to play with.

Neurologically, we are organised so that **certain actions go together relatively easily.** Try sitting up, say on the front edge of a chair (you can do an equivalent action lying curled on your side in bed, if you prefer). Relax and slowly curve your lower back backwards i.e. towards the back of the chair. See how far you go softly slumping, just easing into it, exhaling and letting your eyes gradually lower towards your hips. Then, sit up and try again. This time, keep your eyes looking up above the horizon, inhale and softly curve your back towards the chair. Using the same amount of energy, do you go the same distance? I find letting my eyes lower as I exhale means I curve much further just by relaxing. What is your experience? Can you find your version that feels coherently calm and co-ordinated and reduces the energy needed to move? Can you also find a co-ordinated version of turning your head and eyes?

Athletes practice **connecting ideas and movements** to make the most of their energy. We can practice the same mind/body principles to help us with our energy usage. We can use preparatory visualisation of lightness and flow before we go for a short walk, like a sprinter would use preparing to run a race. Like an ice skater focusing and gliding in anticipation of an airborne spin, we can find settled mindful balance before standing up from a chair.

We can also lighten our loads. Tension can build up incrementally in shoulders, toes, tongues, tummies and jaws without us registering it. Do you know the two prime areas you hold tension? Can you move one area very slowly to feel the stiffness and then breathe into that area and sigh tension out? By **reducing of our habits of holding tension**, we get to relax more consciously; we lessen unnecessary energy wastage and we have more energy for the fun stuff.

Connective tissue, including fascia, surrounds our cells, our organs and covers our muscles. It is a complex structure with elastic properties that adapts and changes. Usually when we stretch a limb out, or twist our torso, we stretch the elastic components then recoil helps us draw back to centre. Keeping our fascia hydrated and elastic gives us **free energy** smooth recoil. Self-myofascial massage with soft balls or soft rollers can help fascial health.

Some movements and positions have been found to **induce a state of calm,** like lying with hips slightly raised and legs in the air. They can be useful for down regulating and conserving energy between activities and for resting in times of overwhelm. If you regularly practice your favourite calming positions, they may also become physical prompts for your brain and body to relax more readily.

**Breathing with more comfort and ease** can also help autonomic regulation. Researchers have noted breathing patterns of people with ME/CFS can be disrupted, so some in the community try Yogic techniques to help restore breathing patterns. Even more simply, we can enjoy relaxing the chest, belly and face and finding a lovely sigh out that helps the body settle into a calm resting state. Soft eyes and soft tongue and sigh. Ahhhhhhhh.

**If we gently practice several of our preferred ways, and we improve just 2% in each, it adds up to a valuable energy gift and helps us enjoy more calm in our brains and bodies.**