

Strength and Flexibility... Two Birds, One Stone

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Strength and flexibility... these are two things that everyone wants to develop and improve but are rarely combined together in proper balance.

A major hurdle for most beginning Systema practitioners is understanding the nature of tension in their bodies and being able to relax parts of the body that are not needed while working alone or with partners. Instead of engaging sets of elements along a kinetic chain (like the leg or arm) as is usually done in traditional strength moves, the work in Systema requires the ability to **generate strength and flexibility together** in a very controlled way to help you escape destructive energy or protect yourself while falling down.

One unique feature of Systema conditioning is that many of the exercises stretch and strengthen the body at the same time in a healthy and functional way this allows the student to gain control of individual elements in their bodies so that they can use less energy and get out of their own way. There are simply no other mainstream methods that match the effectiveness of this approach when it is combined with **proper breathing**.



Try standing up from a prone position without using your arms, and you will immediately realize that you need to work the connective tissues first (tendons and ligaments), in order to gain favorable positioning. Then, as the joints are beginning to lift off of the ground, the work and strain is more apparent and more heavily focused at the tendons. As you get to a place of leverage with your legs, the muscles can then be utilized more directly. Doing

these kinds of movements slowly allows you to keep the focus on the connective tissues while engaging the breath. If you try to power through this exercise, you may find yourself holding your breath involuntarily and even causing sprains in the muscles or worse.

There are countless exercises that stress the tendons in this way. Done over time, you can strengthen tendons and ligaments by stressing them and at the same time expanding your ability to work at the extreme ranges of motion, places where the traditional notion of work and strength do not apply.

Understanding the interaction of the muscles, joints, and connective tissues in load-bearing movements and developing selective control over these elements in uncomfortable positions is the key to progressing toward the natural, free-flowing, effortless, and precise movement that is displayed by the masters in Systema.



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