



SOMATIC RESPONSE

The Withdrawal/Somatic Response (Modified from Thomas Hannah-Book-Somatics)

The withdrawal response is amazingly quick. If someone outside the room dropped a platter of glasses and there was a large sound of shattering, this is what happens: Within 14 milliseconds the muscles of our jaws begin to contract;

- **Intervention-Release Jaw with Lions Breath**-inhale, on the exhale stick tongue out and say, “Blahh...” this is immediately followed about 20 milliseconds later by a contraction of our eyes and brows.

- **Intervention-Rub hands together** quickly to create heat in the hands and place warm hands over eyes. Soften eyes into the heat and say to yourself “soft eyes” and/or allow your forehead to rest on your hands on the desk or table and press into the point between your eyes and take a few breaths.

But, before our eyes have squeezed shut, our shoulders and neck muscles (the trapezius) have received a neural impulse at 25 milliseconds to contract, raising our shoulders and bringing our heads forward.

- **Intervention-Release neck and shoulders with shoulder rolls** forward and back and raising shoulders up to the ears and slowly lower them down

At 60 milliseconds, our elbows bend, and then our hands begin to turn palms downward.

- **Intervention: Turn arms and hands out, Chest Stretch**

These descending neural impulses continue by contracting the abdominal muscle, which brings the trunk forward simultaneously pulling down the rib cage and stopping our breathing.

- **Intervention: Slow belly breathing-soft belly, Crescent Side Stretch**

And, immediately after that, our knees bend and point inward, while our ankles roll our feet inward. The muscles of the crotch tighten, and the toes lift upward. This sums up the Red Light reflex – the body’s withdrawal from danger. The body is flexed and crouched, almost as if ready to fall and curl up in a fetal posture.

- **Interventions: Lunge Pose, Tree Pose**

This cascade of neural impulses begins in the face, then goes down to the neck, then to the arms trunk, and finally, to the legs and toes. Why this sequence from the head downward? Because the impulse originates in the lower-level brain stem and arrives at the muscles of the head region earliest, taking time to travel down its nerve pathways to the lower parts of the body. The withdrawal reflex is more primitive than our voluntary actions and it is much faster. It happens before we can consciously perceive it or inhibit it. It is our primitive protector, whose motto is, act now think later.