



# What WORKS



By: Bob Van Oosterhout, M.A.  
[www.bobvanoosterhout.com](http://www.bobvanoosterhout.com)

## Getting Our Feet on the Ground

When we say that a person has his or her “feet on the ground,” we get a picture of someone who is solid, stable, dependable, and trustworthy; one who is in touch with their surroundings, and sees and thinks clearly. People with their “feet on the ground” understand what’s important in a given situation, and possess the right balance of confidence, openness, and humility.

Tension distorts and disrupts our thoughts, perceptions, and emotions. As tension builds, we become more reactive and less able to tune into what’s going on around us.

“Grounding” is a process that both literally and figuratively puts our feet on the ground. We perform better in any situation when we are grounded. It restores our natural state



where abilities, creativity, and awareness come together to effectively respond to challenges and opportunities in the moment.

Most of us are unaware of how tense we are. Tensing the same muscle groups repeatedly soon forms a habit that becomes structured in our bodies. It’s like wearing a watch or a ring: We lose awareness of it because it’s there all the time.

### Here’s how it works

Every group of muscles has an opposing muscle group. Since tension involves muscles working without moving, the first step is to find a neutral position where opposing groups of muscles are in balance.

When standing, this means that knees are bent, pelvis is directly over the feet, and weight is centered just behind the balls of the feet. If the shoulders are centered over the pelvis (not leaning forward or back) and the head is directly on top of the spine (not straining forward or back), the skeleton is able to provide support so muscles don’t have to work. (See figure 1: This position and related exercises are illustrated in videos that can be viewed on my website at [www.bobvanoosterhout.com](http://www.bobvanoosterhout.com))

Grounding exercises are often initially uncomfortable when tension has built up because they are different than what our body is used to. But with practice, our body realizes that this neutral position is natural, and that we feel and function better when we are grounded.

### How we lose grounding

We lose the benefits of grounding whenever we start building tension. Stress always

creates tension, as does trying too hard, thinking about one thing while doing another, pushing ourselves, and being over-tired. As tension continues to build, we become less grounded, less effective, and less aware that we are building tension.

### Effects of grounding

Grounding allows us to become more aware of when we first start to tense. This allows us to prevent it from building and then to check the thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions that might be contributing to our stress. It’s helpful to practice grounding exercises before any activity where optimum performance is important. Students in my stress management course regularly describe how grounding improves their performance while studying, taking tests, and in dealing with difficult work and relationship stressors. Grounding is a process of getting our body, mind, and emotions all working together so that our natural gifts and abilities can come through. That’s what works, and it’s one more thing you can do to take charge of your health and well-being.

### About Bob Van Oosterhout

Bob Van Oosterhout is a Licensed Masters Social Worker and Limited Licensed Psychologist who provides counseling to patients at MidMichigan Health Park - Houghton Lake. He teaches Stress Management both on-line and on-campus in the Physical Fitness and Wellness Department at Lansing Community College. Additional writing and resources along with previous and future articles in this series can be found on his website at [www.bobvanoosterhout.com](http://www.bobvanoosterhout.com)