

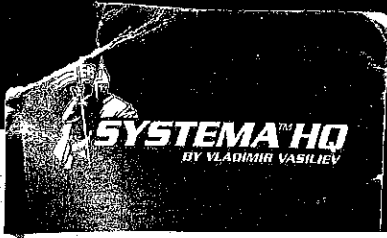
## THE SYSTEM

### 1.1.2 – The Muscular Isolation Brain Map

Advanced practitioners of Systema can seem to have truly superhuman abilities. These can range from being able to do extensive endurance work with little evidence of any exhaustion, to literally being able to run a step or two along a vertical wall and then spring off it into a roll on the floor, being thrown into a wall bodily by several other practitioners with seemingly no ill effect, rolling out of moving vehicles with little or no damage, and many other feats supposedly belonging in the pages of superhero comic books. In great part, this is mostly due to the fact that our bodies are for the most part not being used correctly in our modern age. The human body has extensive redundancy built into it, and even if we allow several muscle groups to atrophy through disuse, misuse, injury, or repetitive strain on them, our bodies will still seem to function "well". The reality is that the difference between a body that has all the normal deficiencies found in most sedentary lifestyles, or alternatively the accumulation of various muscular and skeletal (to say nothing of the psychological) injuries from extreme sports or martial endeavours, and a body that has maximised the efficiency, utility, flexibility, and effectiveness of every muscle and groups of muscles is so vast that it does indeed appear miraculous.

Systema exercises—in particular those drills specifically designed to develop ligament strength and muscular flexibility—will also help refine muscular isolation and thus create a body that has a much higher degree of refinement of movement.

In order to develop all of these benefits, it is essential that a regular program of daily exercises is considered, and these should be Systema-specific exercises, which will in any case improve your overall health and fitness regardless of any martial prowess you may wish to develop. Ultimately, doing these various exercises will develop a much greater appreciation and sensitivity of your own body and of each muscle and muscle groups. In essence, you will gradually become more and more able to isolate muscles and only use those specifically required for a task so as to consume the least amount of energy possible.



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### Exercises to Develop the Muscular Isolation Brain Map

Several of the exercises mentioned below are common to most Systema sessions, so not all of them will be described in particularly detailed fashion.

**The Systema Push-up** – This differs from the more commonly executed push up in several ways. Firstly sometimes merely the push-up position (with arms extended) is held for several minutes. Secondly, when a push up is done, it should always be done with an even speed throughout. No jerking motions to “finish” it or to “push through”. In fact some Systema push-ups should take several minutes to perform. I have also heard (from reputable sources) that in the advanced special forces training, a single push-up could take an hour. Thirdly, sometimes the push-up is done only with the shoulders, other times with the hands in different positions (stretched out in front of you, or lower beside the hips, or with asymmetrical locations, for example one hand by the waist and the other “above” or in-front of the head, and switching positions between each push-up or set of push-ups.

Persons used to doing the jerky-motion types of push-ups, so common in many Karate *dojos*, would be advised to take care and move slowly at first, because many martial artists often have injuries of the shoulder rotor cuff, and this exercise, by being smooth and applying pressure equally throughout the movement, will highlight any weak areas. Trying to do this movement with the right mental attitude of relaxation, smoothness, and no ego is safe; but such attitudes are developed for the most part and rarely inborn, so the normal experience will be that after only a few such push-ups, even a fit martial artist will begin to experience physical failure. If at this point the predominant mental attitude is to “force” through the pain, an injury can result. Better to relax, fail temporarily if required and “live” to fight on in a few seconds again. Areas of movement that one wants to “rush” through should have particular attention paid to them and indeed one should go “through” such areas of weakness by repeatedly travelling through

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them slowly and carefully, thereby healing the old injury or atrophied muscle or scar tissue.

**The Systema Squat** – Similar to the push-up this should also be done smoothly and slowly at first. The breathing component, as with the push-ups, can vary, so one is breathing out on the way down and in on the way up, or the reverse, or simply breathing out for a set of say three (or five, or more. One can go up to 20 with a single breath with a little practice), and then in for a similar set. Sometimes sets of smooth squats and/or push-ups are also done on empty lungs with the breath being held (see section 5 later). When doing squats, the chest and shoulders should be completely relaxed and not involved in the movement, no tension should be in these locations. The back should be as straight as possible, and once the correct smoothness of muscles been developed a little, one can begin to allow gravity to do pretty much all the work when going down, and similarly allow the momentum of the little bounce at the bottom to propel one back up. While at first ten sets of 20 squats would make walking difficult for the next several days, if not longer, with regular Systema exercises, one can easily do more than a couple of hundred squats in a training session and feel little or no discomfort at all the next day.

**The Systema Leg-raises and Sit-ups** – Using the same principles identical to the ones already described for push-ups and squats, of continuation of breath, smoothness of movement, and lack of tension in muscle groups not involved in the exercise; you can also perform leg-raises, which can go all the way to the back of your head and touch the ground behind you, and if you are flexible enough even go on to rest the knees on the floor next to your head, and sit-ups, which once correctly understood, you will be able to do a lot more than you ever could before without ill-effect or even muscle soreness the next day.