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THE WAY YOU MOVE

TUNE IN TO YOUR BODY

Yoga, Pilates and other techniques can keep you in balance

BY DONNA OLMSTEAD For the Journal

Listening to body messages, like an ache in a joint or a spasm in a muscle, can provide necessary information to heal an injury or break through to a new level of fitness.

“Bodies do know how to heal themselves if we tune in and pay attention,” says Patti Lentz, a physical therapist and yoga teacher. “If we move more slowly and work more slowly, we’re able to pay attention to subtle differences.”

Becoming aware of body mechanics and fine-tuning those skills for individual differences helps Lentz’s students and clients build strength and flexibility and find less painful patterns of motion, she says.

Lentz teaches back care and therapeutic and general yoga classes at High Desert Yoga on Copper NE. She also occasionally teaches four-hour anatomy classes at the studio.

“If we know the possibilities of how a hip joint can move, we can access something more subtle in our bodies. We can bring more awareness into how we’re moving,” she says.

Lentz is one of many fitness instructors in Albuquerque who use techniques such as yoga, Pilates, Gyrotonic and Feldenkrais to improve strength, flexibility and sense of movement. People who teach the techniques say the movements are key to bringing the body into a balanced state.

Be careful

Lentz has been a physical therapist for more than 30 years. Several years ago she trained as a yoga teacher so she could offer her clients safe ways to rebuild their strength.

Awareness isn’t for yogis only, she says. “You can bring that same awareness to weight training, if you learn to pay attention to the subtle changes of tension in the muscle,” she says.

However, she promotes the conclusions of a recent medical study that demonstrated that people with back pain who practiced yoga consistently had less pain and more mobility. They were compared to a control group that did nothing and another group that performed another series of exercises.

“It was the quality of awareness that was different,” Lentz says. “People who practiced yoga had learned to pay attention in a different way.”

People do so many things at once and don’t really focus on anything in particular, she says. “Chances of injury ... are greater if we aren’t paying attention.”

Some people become so outof-touch with their bodies they have no awareness until something hurts.

Pain is a warning, she says. "Pain is an indication that something is wrong." She encourages students and clients to back off from the pain to find the beginning of the tension and work from there.

"There's a sense of tension and a sense of collapse and whole range in between," she says. In the same way, fear is a yellow light of caution. Inverted poses, such as handstands, frighten many people.

"Maybe I feel fear in my chest when I go upside down. If I pause and bring curiosity and awareness, maybe I can approach it in a way that feels safe."

Range of motion

At Momentum Studio on Menaul NE, Aline and Bryan Alexander help clients build strength and flexibility through ranges of motion. They teach and train clients and teachers in several movement exercise systems — Pilates, Gyrotonic and Feldenkrais.

Tennis players and golfers come because they want to add a competitive edge to their game, Aline Alexander says. Ballet dancers come to improve flexibility and prevent injuries.

Clients of all ages with acute and chronic injuries come to regain mobility and alleviate pain, she says.

"We have clients whose compensatory patterns from injuries when they were 20 are catching up with them."

People with knee injuries usually have lower back problems, she says. "We look above and below the injury to find out what's going on in the body."

Correcting adaptations that cause pain takes time, she says. "A pattern of 20 years isn't going to go away in six weeks. But we do know that people see differences and feel better right away."

Getting stronger

Thelma Domenici, president of a company that teaches social and corporate etiquette, says, "I've tried everything to stay strong and flexible. With Momentum, I am ever so much stronger."

Domenici says she has worked out in private Gyrotonic sessions three times a week for about a year. "I have a bad back. There were exercises I could not do when I started and now I can."

Nine years ago Domenici had surgery in which doctors inserted metal rods in her back. She walked, biked, swam and did water aerobics to maintain her physical abilities, but after finding Gyrotonic exercises, she says she felt much better and has increased mobility, balance and strength in all of her daily activities. She keeps up with her workout schedule because after each session, "I feel a sense of celebration of getting stronger. I have such a sense of accomplishment."

The best medicine

Aline Alexander, trained as a ballet dancer, has been teaching movement for 20 years and has advanced training and teaching certificates. Bryan Alexander has a doctorate degree in biomedical research.

Together they help clients discover what system or blend of systems will best serve their physical goals. For example, one tennis player wanted to work on the trapezoidal Gyrotonic equipment to improve the power in her swing and her range of motion. The Alexanders added Pilates core work to improve abdominal strength to use the Gyrotonic equipment more effectively.

"People develop superficial muscles, but they aren't really strong on the inside," she explains. "We work to develop the intrinsic muscles that allow precision movement so people can be more comfortable in their bodies."



ADOLPHE PIERRE-LOUIS/JOURNAL Patti Lentz teaches therapeutic yoga stretches in a class at High Desert Yoga.

Balancers

Several techniques — yoga, Pilates, Gyrotonic and Feldenkrais — can help you lay the foundation for balance in your physical and emotional fitness. Here's a glance at how they work.

YOGA: A practice of physical postures and breathing that dates to ancient religious scripture in India.

PILATES: Uses precise alignment to integrate control and flexibility, as well as strengthen precision. It also uses breath and fluidity of movement to build body awareness.

Pilates builds strength "from the inside out," says Aline Alexander of Momentum Studio — by developing streng

to — by developing strong abdominal and postural muscles to act as the “powerhouse” of the body.

GYROTONIC: Series of exercises based on yoga, dance, swimming and martial arts. The movements place special emphasis on the spine, Alexander says.

The Hungarian-born dancer Juliu Horvath developed the method after an injury while he was a principal dancer with the Houston Ballet, according to gyrotonic.com.

He brought his exercise method to New York City in the 1980s, calling it “yoga for dancers.” He developed a machine, the Gyrotonic Expansion System, with an overhead pulley tower, a bench and paddles to allow participants to twist, stretch and bend in spherical and circular motions through all muscle groups.

FELDENKRAIS: Helps people move with less effort and avoid injury. Moshe Feldenkrais, born in 1904, developed it to heal from a knee injury.

Alexander says people are often unaware of how they move or how they hold themselves, which may be restricted by cultural or societal expectations.



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