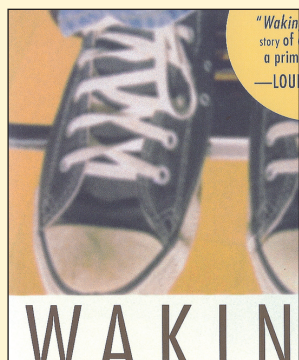


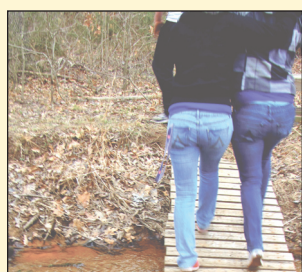


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MIND-BODY FITNESS: "IT'S ABOUT STARTING..."

by Jessica Orange

Fitness for the mind and body—the phrase is a nebulous universe unto itself. It has become a familiar notion, but what does it actually entail? Images of well disciplined yogis with blissfully relaxed countenances or spry contortionists pretzeled into impossible poses might appear if we think of what it looks like when someone “achieves” mind-body fitness. But what else can it look like? What can it mean for you?

Watching my three-year-old boys tumble in the grass, they are fully present with their bodies—everything outside of that is a distraction competing with the feel of the cool blades crushing under their knees. They are entirely free from any nagging sense of what they “could” or “should” be doing. If a rotund bumblebee lands in front of them, it becomes the focus of their entire universe. When it flies off they may rue its departure and plead “Mommy get that bumblebee back!” but the missing bee will in no way detract from the next moment’s joy, which may come in the form of a fat dragon fly or fluttering white garden moth. As long as the moment is allowed to pass without interference of parent or schedule, the boys will move weightlessly on.

Mind-body fitness draws on this experience of being fully present in the moment, and is rooted in the Eastern philosophy that body, mind, and spiritual health are inseparable. Fortunately, the West is catching on, as evidenced by the growing popularity of fitness practices that incorporate meditative mental benefits, along with meditation itself.



photo by Sharon

According to Mayo Clinic experts (www.mayoclinic.com/health/mediation/HQ01070), there is a growing body of scientific research to support the physical and mental benefits of meditation. While these experts are careful to caution against overstating the results of existing and emerging studies, they assert that meditation may help relieve allergies, asthma, heart disease, high blood pressure, pain, and cancer. Stress, sleep problems, fatigue, anxiety disorders, depression, binge eating, and substance abuse can also be reduced. (See sidebar on page 9 for two examples of mind-body fitness practices).

The Mayo Clinic website explains, “Meditation helps by clearing away the information overload that builds up every day and contributes to stress. The increased self-awareness that meditation brings helps you focus on the present moment, reduces

your negative emotions, and builds skills to better manage your stress.”

“It’s about starting,” said Fred Rozumalski, a Minneapolis resident and regular meditation practitioner. He “sits” every day; some days less, some days more. “Developing a practice begins with setting a time and a place to meditate, which becomes part of your life’s routine,” said Rozumalski. “You sit and do it no matter what.” While he begins at the same time, 6 a.m., everyday, he does not force the session to last a predetermined time and will end if he cannot focus. “But you almost always get something,” he said. As is true in so many areas of life, meditation is about progress, not perfection. The goal is not stopping negative thoughts, rather, as he says, “Let the thought come, but let it pass by too.”

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Meditation: science of the mind

By Jeanne Souldern

Meditation. What are your first thoughts when you hear the word? You might be thinking, “Well, that’s for other people. I’ve never had the discipline to do something like that” and before you’ve even started, you’re finished. But don’t be so quick to dismiss meditation as a tool in attaining and maintaining a balanced state of health and wellness.

One of the keys to having success with a meditation practice is in understanding that it is a process, begun with small steps leading to small accomplishments. Jill Englund has been practicing meditation for 25 years, has 10 years of experience as a facilitator of meditation sessions, and a Bachelor of Science in metaphysics from the American Institute of Holistic Theology. She is all too familiar



Jill Englund

with the common obstacles most beginners face. As Englund states, “Meditation is a lot like exercise; when you first begin an exercise program, you may have goals in mind, you may go to the gym feeling tired and wonder; how is this helping? But as you continue, in faith, you eventually begin to see the results. Sometimes others in your life will start to see the results before you recognize them yourself.”

In her business, Steps to Well-Being, Englund introduces meditation, guided imagery,

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body / mind fitness

from page 1

Rozumalski's meditation journey began when he spent six months outside his own culture, deeply relaxing and traveling through Australia and New Zealand. "I wanted to somehow keep that, to be able to touch it every day."

Sometime after returning to Minnesota, he passed by the Meditation Center in Northeast Minneapolis on his way to get lunch at Emily's Deli. "This is it," he said, and went in. After talking to one of the swamis (teachers), he started taking classes and began his daily meditation practice. He noticed positive results immediately. "I had more energy and I was especially able to focus better." He found he was able to "worry less, to see and connect with the big picture, and not be bothered by so many little things anymore." He also found mediation helped him develop and become much more conscious of his own personal values.

Rozumalski was attracted to the "practical, common sense" approach to life presented by Swami Hari, with whom he studied at the Meditation Center and in India. "He always said 'this is science...this is science' when describing the effect yogic meditation has on brain function." Rozumalski explained that the deep mental and physical relaxation achieved through meditation alters brain waves and allows them to operate on a "higher frequency." "The effect is elevating. You feel light, healthy, connected, and the residual benefit carries with you throughout your day."

"Your brain puts out lots of chemicals," he continued, "and these chemicals stay in your body for a while. For example, if you get really, really angry, that stays with you after the situation ends," said Rozumalski. "If your brain goes into the fight or flight response, all the chemicals released then have a residual effect." It is this same process, he said, that carries the positive, calming effects of sitting meditation with you for a time after your mediation session has ended.

Dennis McGuire, an accomplished Twin Cities yogi and practitioner of qigong, credits a scientific approach to yoga and energy medicine for sparking his passion and fueling his studies, yet he said there is "something more" going on in our bodies. "You can use your mind to improve your health," McGuire firmly stated. He explained that, of the five bodies addressed in traditional yoga, Western medicine only concerns itself with the "physical" and "energy" bodies. The other three, roughly described as "mental, intuitive, and bliss/spiritual," are what traditional Eastern medicine considers key to complete healing.

McGuire told the story of journalist James Reston who went to China in 1971 during Henry Kissinger's his-

toric visit and announcement that President Nixon would soon "open" China to the West. While there, Reston suffered an acute appendicitis attack and needed emergency surgery to remove the infected organ. He was rushed to a local hospital, which offered a local anesthetic for the surgery and treated his post-operative pain with acupuncture. Reston's *New York Times* write-up of the experience is credited with introducing acupuncture to the U.S.

Qi (pronounced "chee") is the foundation for mind-body health and for traditional Eastern medicine. Commonly translated as the energy force of all living things, qi is moved throughout the body through breathing exercises in mind-body fitness. In the traditional practice of acupuncture, fine needles are inserted along "meridians" or channels in the body through which qi flows. Using anatomy to guide needle placement, the practitioner improves chi flow to heal and quiet pain. In "body work" like massage or craniosacral therapy, the purpose is release. Upon encountering a tense spot or muscle knot, the practitioner will work to release this place of "holding," which brings increased vitality and relief.

But how to begin? McGuire stressed the importance of always maintaining a beginner's openness to the possibility that "something" will hap-

pen as you work on mind and body fitness. He emphasized the learning process and said the benefits of yoga come through achieving a certain level of proficiency with the "asanas" or poses. He implored people to listen to their own bodies first to avoid injury.

Can mind-body practice begin with the body? In his essay, "Yoga and World Peace," (www.yogasadhana.net/Yoga_World_Peace.html) McGuire wrote, "I do not believe yoga can be merely physical" and goes on to describe a chemical dependency counselor who intentionally used yoga with his clients as a "merely physical" practice, and said they were still helped in emotional and spiritual ways as well. "We as yogis should encourage the practice of yoga as physical exercise, when taught by qualified teachers, because more than physical health is improved by the practice," wrote McGuire.

While there is considerable skepticism among some "purists," both Rozumalski and McGuire whole-heartedly agree that a health club is a fine place to learn mind-body fitness, provided you find a knowledgeable instructor who is a good fit. Rozumalski said the key is to create a daily practice no matter what form that takes. The crucial part is "Working with your body to affect your mind and find peace," which he believes can happen with other types of exercise as well—even jogging, walking, swimming, etc.

Why focus on mind-body fitness? Consider McGuire's conclusion after a prestigious yoga teacher-training program: "I realized that I was gaining valuable knowledge...but I realized with surprise that I was happier and my life was more of a pleasure. The most important thing I learned during teacher training was completely unexpected: it was joy."

For more information, the University of Minnesota's Center for Healing and Spirituality's website (www.csh.umn.edu/) offers valuable guidance to get you started on the pursuit of mind-body health.

Jessica Orange is a published poet, and creative writing instructor. She lives with her husband and their twin toddlers in Deephaven, Minnesota.

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Resources for fine tuning your **body & mind**

compiled by Jessica Orange

Consider philosophy, location, and cost, as well as special requirements you may have when looking for classes. Many places offer free trial classes, so be sure to keep looking until you find a good match. The list below is a brief compilation of local resources, and it is always a good idea to get recommendations from friends who have similar goals and requirements.

Community education programs often offer a variety of fitness classes at schools and community centers. These programs are affordable, and staying local gives you the chance to meet others who may be starting a similar path to better mind-body health. Many fitness centers also offer mind-body fitness programs, which can compliment your other fitness goals, and often provide conveniences like childcare.

Beyond that, always remember to listen closely to what your body is telling you on any given day and never push beyond what it can handle—doing so is likely to result in injury.

The Meditation Center

631 University Ave NE
Minneapolis
www.themeditationcenter.org
Classes, retreats, and more, including family and children's activities. Founded in the Himalayan Tradition and centered on Raja Yoga, the center provides "an integrated, scientific, experiential approach to improving a person's ability to skillfully use mind and body in everyday life."

Minnesota Zen Meditation Center

3343 East Calhoun Parkway
Minneapolis, MN 55408
www.mnzencenter.org
A well-established source offering classes, seminars, speakers, retreats and other activities devoted to zazen, or Zen Meditation, including free sessions for first time meditators: Sundays 8:30-9:50 a.m. (followed by optional lecture at 10:00 and tea at 11:00); First and third Tuesdays of each month 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Spring Forest Qigong Center

7520 Market Place Drive
Eden Prairie, MN 55344
www.springforestqigong.com
Qigong training and practice, also with a focus on healing of self and others. Check out the website for two Spring Forest exercises to experience an introduction.

The Marsh

15000 Minnetonka Blvd
Minnetonka, MN 55345-1500
(952) 935-2202
www.themarsh.com
Dedicated to "Wellness through educational programs, services, environment, professional care and personal guidance," the Marsh is a comprehensive facility offering classes, exercise facilities, bodywork, on-site physical therapy, a spa, restaurant, and overnight stays. Open to the public and

offers membership.
Dennis McGuire
www.yogasadhana.net
An accomplished yogi with advanced training, also a member of International Association of Yoga Therapists. Visit his website for current class listings, and to read his essay, "Yoga and World Peace."

Institute of the Himalayan Tradition

1317 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55105
www.ihtyoga.org
Classes, seminars, workshops and retreats in Hatha Yoga, meditation, wellness, philosophy of life, and personal growth.

Mind Body Solutions

17516 Minnetonka Blvd.
Minnetonka, MN 55345
952-473-3700
www.mindbodysolutions.org
Founded by Matthew Sanford, this non-profit offers yoga classes for all levels of ability and disability. Sanford is also an author and speaker who says: "It took a devastating car accident, paralysis from the chest down, and dependence on a wheelchair before I truly realized the importance of my body."

YWCA Minneapolis

Several TCMA locations. Visit the website for details and locations.
www.ywca-minneapolis.org
Group fitness offerings include a wide selection of "Mind-Body" classes, including MS Yoga for people with multiple sclerosis, certified by the MS Society. Also designed to address other chronic conditions as well as rehabilitation from an injury.

One Yoga

2100B Lyndale Avenue S., Mpls.
www.one-yoga.com
A nonprofit organization offering yoga to the whole community with sliding scale fees for studio classes and onsite classes to community partners. Free bi-monthly introductory classes.

Bikram's Yoga College of India

2836 Lyndale Av S, Minneapolis
on the Midtown Greenway
612-870-YOGA (9642)
www.bikramyogamn.com
Bikram Yoga uses a series of Hatha Yoga postures and breathing exercises, performed in a hot room.

St. Paul Yoga Center

1162 Selby Avenue, St. Paul
www.stpaulyogacenter.com
See website for registration and instructor contact information.

Yoga Center of Minneapolis

Mpls Studio: 212 3rd Ave. N, Ste 205
St. Louis Pk: 4200 Minnetonka Blvd.
http://yogacentermpls.com

City of Lakes Tai Chi

3010 Minnehaha Ave., Mpls
612-722-5799
www.cityoflakestaichi.org

National Qigong (Chi Kung) Association, St. Paul, MN

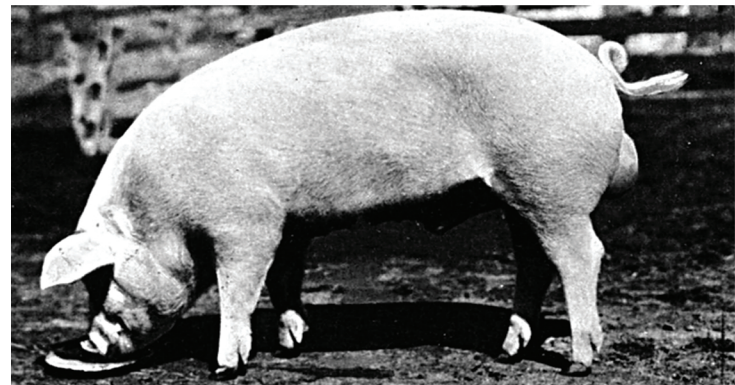
1-888-815-1893, www.nqa.org

terminology

"Yoga" can be translated to mean "union" or "yoking" as happens when mind, body and spirit come together. With yoga's ever widening swath of mainstream popularity, it is generally the physical poses, or asanas, that we refer to when we think of any type of yoga. While the asanas are indeed central to the practice of yoga, they actually comprise one of "eight limbs" of yoga, the majority of which have to do with mental and spiritual concerns. Traditional history holds that yoga was developed to improve one's ability to perform sitting meditation. Yogis found they could sit longer with less pain when they were physically fit.

Qigong (pronounced "chee gung") is part of the system of traditional Chinese medicine. It combines meditation, deep relaxation, breathing and physical exercise to restore and encourage balance and greater qi flow. Qigong can be practiced as a martial, medical, or spiritual art. Each style has three things in common: they all involve a posture, (whether moving or stationary), breathing techniques, and mental focus. Practices vary in intensity from the gentle Tai Chi to the vigorous Kung Fu. The slow, gentle movements of most Qigong forms can be easily adapted, even for the physically challenged and can be practiced by all age groups.

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