



The Nia technique

Physical movement is essential to a woman's health. Our bodies were designed to wriggle, flex and flow. Our bones, ligaments, and supple muscles are rich with the desire to engage with music and rhythm. A wonderful dance style is now promising Australian women the opportunity to do so, not only to become physically fit, but to also encourage inner growth. **Su-lin Sze**, a Sydney-based holistic movement instructor, describes the beauty of a dance exercise concept called the Nia technique.

LOVE YOUR FITNESS

One of the ways we can combine the goals of physical fitness with self-development is with dance. The Nia technique certainly ticks both boxes. It fuses nine different movement forms from both Eastern and Western cultures into a range of choreographed movement experiences.

The technique is becoming well-known for its exhilarating and atmospheric approach to music. Nia technique is about experiencing from within, and moving for the simple pleasure of movement. Ultimately, it makes us more aware of our physical bodies just as traditional approaches to exercise will do, but in a more loving way. But we are not just talking about the physical effects of exercise here, we are talking about a holistic approach to movement that keeps us mentally, emotionally and spiritually fit as well.

AN ORIENTAL INFLUENCE

Lately, we've seen an explosion of interest in Eastern movement forms such as belly dance, tai chi, aikido, Osho's moving meditations, yoga, and of course, the Nia technique. This interest shows that as Westerners, we're seeking more pleasure in our movement, and more self-connection. And that makes sense – as research shows time and again, movement activities that target the mind and

body can provide psychological benefits, such as improving mood, self esteem and reducing anxiety and depression.

Movement activities that have a more holistic approach to wellbeing are becoming increasingly popular in the West where mental illness, anxiety, addictions and depression are rife. It looks like we're beginning to realise that self-healing is just as important as working up a sweat.

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HOW IT WORKS

The Nia technique draws on movements from tai chi, aikido, taekwondo, jazz dance, Duncan dance, modern dance, Alexander

technique, Feldenkrais method and yoga to create an exhilarating experience. Combining easy-to-follow movements infused with grace and naturalness, with music that touches the soul, this is the sort of workout where you can form a closer, healthier relationship to your own body. Therefore, in every class you get a taste of martial arts, dance arts and the healing arts.

Nia instructor Kathy Wolstenholme says the experience is quite unique.

"At Nia demonstrations, people witness a body not performing, but rather responding to sound in a way that is natural. It's a body that places serenity in the same breath as strength, and combines beauty and power in one gesture," she says. "People know this kind of movement is inside them too."

WHAT THE STUDIES SHOW

In the late 1990s, US-based health scientist Dr Deborah Kern studied the effects of the Nia technique compared to standard

NIA TECHNIQUE BENEFITS

- Improved cardiovascular endurance
- Improved balance and coordination
- Reduced anxiety and tension
- Opportunity to vocalise and express
- Improved posture and sensory awareness
- Building of 'chi' (energy) reservoirs

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NIA TECHNIQUE



aerobic activity on mood, anxiety and self-esteem. Dr Kern found the Nia technique participants enjoyed an increased sense of wellbeing 'beyond the physical realm', many reflecting on the usefulness of the classes in other areas of their life that could be stressful or challenging. Those in the study who stuck to standard aerobics classes were more likely to mention sensations such as 'feeling tired' or 'feeling hungry' afterwards.

Everybody has their own approach to fitness. It's a personal journey to discover what your body knew intuitively all along, that some movement styles will suit your body and others won't. Choosing the right sort of fitness style is important for every woman. Engaging in high intensity exercise excessively can actually work against us, by inducing overproduction of stress hormones that are associated with weight gain, sleep difficulties and chronic exhaustion.

"When participating in a Nia class you forget about the outside world and learn to let go."

MOVEMENT FOR PLEASURE

Debbie and Carlos Rosas, creators of the Nia technique, believe exercise should be a pleasurable, enjoyable experience.

"In 1983, we took off our shoes and completely changed the look and feel of fitness. We discovered that love is the way to create a healthy body. We began consciously to feel sensation and choose pleasure over pain. Personal expression, adaptability, and body awareness became important tools for achieving fitness, healing, and transformation," they say.

Sydney student Becky agrees that Nia has healing, rejuvenating benefits.

"Nia is one of the best classes I have ever experienced. Combining different techniques into one class,

I would call it a magical experience. When participating in a Nia class you forget about the outside world and learn to let go. Nia focuses on good energy. It is physical and very good for your soul. After a Nia class you feel completely relaxed all your stress and anxieties seem to disappear. It's well-worth checking it out," she says.

Su-lin Sze is a Naturopath and Holistic Movement Instructor based in Sydney. She teaches the Nia Technique, Movement Meditation and recently trained to teach the ChiBall Method. She can be contacted via her website at www.herbalwell.com.au

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