

Mind-Body Fitness for Personal Trainers

Introduction

The Eastern concept of health and wellness is much broader and more integrated than the typical Western medical model which views health solely as the absence of disease or lack of visible illness. From the Eastern perspective, health, wellness, and wholeness are considered to be our natural state of being, and this natural state is associated with an underlying condition of balance. Yet this is not meant to imply that balance is a preconceived singular condition or a static state of being. Many people are surprised to learn that there is a fluid quality to balance, and that balance, as a prerequisite for health, wellness and wholeness, is ever-changing, accommodating, adjusting, and adapting.

The ancient Chinese dualistic philosophy of Yin and Yang states that when these two opposing yet complementary energies are in balance they yield wholeness, completeness, and a healthy environment. The 'environment' may refer to a human body, a family home, a landscape, or a culture. A change in either Yin or Yang will always be counterbalanced by a compensatory change in the other as a means of restoring balanced wholeness. For example, an increase in Yin will be counterbalanced by a decrease in Yang. In this situation wholeness continues to exist, but it is now in a state of imbalance which is characterized by excessive Yin and deficient Yang. In terms of an individual's health, a gradually increasing imbalance between Yin and Yang energies will eventually result in the manifestation of physical symptoms, illness, disease, or death. Disharmony can arise from various factors such as diet, exercise, sleep, interpersonal relationships, cognitive and behavioral patterns, genetic pre-disposition, or an existential crisis. When the imbalanced bio-energies of a living body reach critical mass, the state of wholeness and existence can no longer be sustained, and death occurs.

Depending on the scope of illness, traditional Tibetan medicine offers four levels of intervention. The first level, which is the least invasive in terms of medical procedures, is lifestyle changes. The second level involves herbs, massage, and other techniques that cleanse and rejuvenate the body.¹ The third level involves more invasive procedures that directly and more aggressively attempt to alter the present condition of the body, such as acupuncture or surgery. The fourth level involves a spiritual approach in which the patient might partake of rituals and reflection to induce a reconditioning of the subtle energies that have created the negative attitudes and mental impressions which, unless resolved, will perpetuate the underlying imbalanced condition and obstruct the healing process.

Ideally, the path toward vitality, longevity, and optimal wellness begins with preventive care. This includes a healthy lifestyle and the ability to make and abide by wise decisions which are based on a combination of self-knowledge and applied general knowledge. The Yin/Yang paradigm suggests that effective lifestyle modifications, including appropriate exercise modalities, will support an artful balance of mind, body, and spiritual benefits. If we want to optimize the human potential for vitality and longevity, both health promotion

and personal growth must become priorities that persist over the course of a lifetime. To this end, the wellness quest, or wellness expedition, must become a lifelong endeavor that is undertaken to achieve a definite objective. A quest or expedition is a purposeful adventure, and in this case it is a wellness-seeking adventure in embodiment that begins with fundamental lessons in somatic education as a means of acquiring in depth knowledge of the Self.

The concept of energy-based techniques originated from the Eastern cultures' holistic approach to wellness. Energy exercises could be defined as interventions that work by eliminating obstructions in the bio-energy flow and by increasing the amount of energy that the body can handle in terms of accommodation and assimilation. Energy exercises work by gently attuning the nuances of alignment and functional movement, creating an environment that is conducive for bio-energy re-vitalization. Bio-energy moves throughout the body via pathways or channels called meridians. These channels are less materialized than the system of blood vessels which circulates blood through the body, but this does not make them any less valuable to the integrity, vitality, and general welfare of the human body. The meridians are a system in which Chi (also known as Qi or Prana), the energy which creates and sustains an individual's life force, travels and operates.

Daoism, an indigenous religious-philosophical Chinese tradition that has existed for more than 2,000 years, describes three levels of intervention that pertain to Chi/Qi management. All three levels of intervention are ways of improving health by increasing energy. The difference lies in the extent of the intervention and specific modifications based on the penultimate goal. The three levels, named for their specific goals, are healing, longevity, and immortality. Healing refers to the replenishing of Qi for the purpose of restoring health using medical interventions such as drugs, herbs, acupuncture, energy exercises, and rest. Longevity refers to health enhancement or *anti-aging* practices. Longevity is accomplished through lifestyle changes that include improvements in diet, breathing, massage, energy exercises, and meditation.² Practices that promote Immortality, which refers to bypassing death and attaining magical powers, are beyond the scope of this text. The 'take away' point is that energy exercises can help to restore, rejuvenate, and optimize health and fitness far beyond what is considered ordinary or average. Energy exercises are a viable form of somatic-based intervention that can help you recover from illness, rebuild energy stores, and perhaps even maintain vitality and ingenuity throughout your golden years.

Incorporating one or more energy exercises into your daily routine is really no different than any other health, fitness, or grooming habit that you have already established. The determining factor for optimal results is regularity. You have to make an energy exercise a part of your daily routine so that it becomes a health-inducing habit. How often do you brush your teeth, take a shower, and swallow vitamins? Aren't these daily activities? Aren't these activities important for your continued well-being? Granted, there is one difference between your standard daily grooming habits and energy exercises. That difference has to do with how soon you get positive feedback and desirable results. If you brush your teeth you get immediate feedback which reinforces the importance of this

behavior. As soon as you rinse the toothpaste out of your mouth, your teeth are shiny and clean, and your breath smells fresh. But in the case of energy exercises, the benefits are not necessarily immediate or obvious.

Generally it takes time for energy exercises, just like good nutritional habits, to elicit the outward (physical) signs of better health. But this does not mean that internal changes in the energy body that cannot be readily seen, sensed, or palpated have not already begun from day one. Another reason you might not notice any remarkable positive change is largely because your sensory awareness is working at a subpar level. This is an overlooked but all too common ailment caused by the predicament of our hectic, contemporary lifestyles. Every day we are bombarded by so much information, choices, activities, data, and devices that we unconsciously begin to tune out much of our external and internal environmental stimuli as a means of coping so that we are not overwhelmed by sensory overload. The trade-off is a dulled sensitivity, an obtuseness or disconnection to our own feelings, desires, tastes, and other signals that are sent by the body to indicate needs, desires, emotions, intuitive ways of knowing, illness, or imbalance.

Another common plague that deadens the life force within us is known as sensori-motor amnesia. SMA is a learned response to a childhood wound or highly traumatic event. SMA occurs when an eventful memory, including its associated emotional state and imprinted body position, are quarantined into the subconscious mind. At the time of the incident, coping and surviving required a self-constructed containment strategy that would make the disturbing memory inaccessible (completely forgotten, as if it never happened). In an extremely traumatic episode it is often preferable to cut off an unbearable or unacceptable emotion (such as fearing or not trusting your primary caregiver), even if this means rejecting any recollection of the event itself, including all relevant sensory impressions. The problem is that a case of sensory motor amnesia which was originally acquired many years or decades ago spills over into present day life. For example, if you learned as a child that withholding love and affection kept potential predators at a distance, thereby promoting your safety and survival, on some level your conditioned tendency to withhold love and affection will persist today. Though the reason for a crisis-related survival response might no longer exist, the suppressed childhood memory of it persists. Even if as an adult you truly want to feel love and affection for another person, your body will stifle that urge. Many people are in need of healing some type of sensory-motor amnesia.

If wellness, longevity, and vitality are important to you, you must begin, as soon as possible and in every possible way, to repeal the damage done by soured somatic awareness that is and/or was insufficient, unreliable, artificially contained, or had been neglected. If you want to achieve excellent or optimal results, you have to be all in. On a daily basis, you must incorporate dietary habits and exercise programs that promote good health and create a balanced condition, and you must also eliminate dietary habits and exercise programs that diminish good health and create an imbalanced condition.

The most common imbalance in western society is excessive Yang and deficient Yin, and this particular imbalance is perpetuated by the type of exercise we do and the type of

foods we eat. The modern lifestyle supports the Yin-deficient status, as evident by the plethora of anxious people who lack stability and are in serious need of nurturing and replenishment. A characteristic Yin-deficient symptom is an abundance of energy that is purely superficial and artificially manufactured to create the appearance of someone who is upbeat, able, happy, and healthy. The Yin-deficient person will tend to eat snacks and sip soft drinks or other beverages during the day, and his relationships will typically be filled with irritations and/or minor skirmishes.³ Degenerative diseases, diabetes, hypoglycemia, tuberculosis, and broad spectrum stress-related illness are indicative of Yin-deficiency.

To restore balance in our bodies and in our lives, most of us must work on increasing the Yin energies, which in turn will tend to decrease the Yang energies. To this end, we recommend a pro-active approach to wellness, working at the intervention level of lifestyle management, through the application of mind-body fitness techniques. In this text you will study mind-body fitness techniques that restore and rebuild Yin energies to create balance and wellness.

The techniques and exercises presented in this text promote nourishment and stability through the embodied exploration of slowness, stillness, calmness, quietness, relaxation, sensory awareness, mindfulness, and self-reflection as the means whereby we learn about the inner workings and relationship between our bodies, minds, and selves, and how all aspects of the essential Self can be successfully integrated and optimized. These techniques and exercises were carefully and purposefully selected for their practicality to be used by certified fitness professionals as instructional methods for their clients. For the most part, these techniques and exercises are simple, straightforward, and will yield promising results. These features are important because they provide positive reinforcement which fuels the desire to keep practicing regularly. Belief in the power of Mind-body fitness contains an element of faith, to be sure, yet these body-based techniques are in no way esoteric or magical, nor are they affiliated with any type of religious doctrine. The benefits and positive results of mind-body fitness and energy exercises are earned, not given. The law of karma says that people eventually get what they deserve, and mind-body fitness is no different. The rewards you reap will be dependent upon the purity and sincerity of your approach and the regularity of your practice. There's no short cut when it comes to evolving your understanding of embodiment and achieving your human potential.

Fitness professionals are familiar and comfortable with activities that involve movement and techniques that train and tone the body. For this reason, some trainers might find it difficult to accept the realm of energy exercises which feature stillness, gentleness, and conserving or replenishing energy instead of using it up. But it is time for forward-thinking fitness professionals to consider the bigger picture which includes what you want to accomplish and contribute during the longer and broader timeframe of a lifetime. It's time for those same fitness professionals to become leaders and role models by demonstrating the comprehensive wellness benefits that accompany a disciplined lifestyle. A major tenant of somatic education, mind-body coaching, and holistic self-help treatment modalities is experiencing and practicing for ourselves what we wish to share

with others. If you are committed to offering a helping hand and becoming a healing force for the benefit of others, you will find that mind-body fitness and energy exercises are valuable training tools that support improvement and full-spectrum wellness in the bodies, minds, and spirits of your clients and your Self.

Now you must ask yourself the million dollar question. How can you possibly become a positive, healing force that is capable of assisting others or benefitting humanity if you cannot even commit to a ten or fifteen minute practice of some sort of disciplined daily energy exercise to sustain your own health? Perhaps the first person that you need to train is you.