

Moving Your Way

By Todd Fiorentino

The people at the YMCA think I'm nuts... because I like to move my body in bizarre ways whether at the bottom of the pool or with weights in hand. Once you have an understanding of basic kinesiology and how each joint type works (ball-and-socket, saddle, etc.), you begin to understand the vast potential of your body. Here we are following these pre-arranged workout patterns and yet we still have bad posture; we're still in pain. Not that it's all bad, but there is more to muscular health than the crawl, shrugs or curls.

Consider dance. Dance is great for your body and nervous system because you get to move your body in ways that it wants to go. Free-form and flowing or frenetic and wild, it doesn't matter, just move! Your body was designed for movement, and lots of it! Many people go the gym and actually just reinforce muscle imbalances. Men build up their shoulders and chest, fulfilling the football player image they've been sold. Women work on their tummys and butts. The media tells us how we should look. And society creates the framework for movement with chairs that curve inward instead of out and exercise routines that people end up quitting out of sheer boredom.

We've become locked in dysfunctional and rote movement patterns. So how do we unlock them? Through experimental movement and dance—finding what feels right for your body. You don't need to be a therapist or a trainer. Your body already knows what it needs. Simply move your body into positions that feel good, perhaps with weights, maybe in the pool or why not your yoga mat? Try the exercise ball or resistance straps to experiment further.

In massage therapy, a technique called positional release was pioneered. Instead of rigorous hands-on manipulations, the therapist simply positions the person in a manner that will "reset" their nervous system, and then leaves them for a period of time. Sometimes clients are put in a "negative position," giving the body what it wants. If your body wants to contract into a ball, try that for a while and then release. It is true that we may want to move in ways that are not beneficial. In these cases, it is good to seek out a massage therapist or physical therapist to get it right.

Identify the dysfunctional patterns and reverse them. If you favor one side, intentionally start favoring the other for a while. You are probably favoring that side because of weakness in a specific area. Once you realize that, you can strengthen the given muscle group. Some muscles need to be strengthened and others just need stretching. If a muscle is overstretched from bad posture, try some weight-bearing exercise to contract it. If a muscle is contracting already from stress, try some stretching. I had a right side forward process going on with my shoulder and leg mainly due to driving. Pushing the gas pedal and moving the stick shift were the culprits. People who are starting to curl their shoulders forward need to strengthen inbetween their shoulderblades and stretch the

chest. Identify the process and work to alter your position. Break out of your routine and try something new!

Did you know that pilates was in part discovered by prisoners taking the springs from their mattresses and doing resistance exercises? It's true. There are a bazillion modalities out there mainly because people started experimenting to see what would work for them. Just look at all of the yoga postures. Is a dance class a remarkable prescription for muscle pain? Yes, it is, but you know what, it just may work. So if you see some guy at the Y swinging his arms wildly at the bottom of the pool or inventing strokes, say "Hi." I'm not as crazy as I look.

Endnote: Here's a stroke I developed, float on your back with your arms straight out overhead. Kick both legs at the same time bending your knees. Glide through the water and relax. My dad noticed that Buddha always seems to have his arms in the air. Maybe there's something to this.