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Be Mindful of your exercise

By Phil Weaver

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Soft, gentle, fluid, mindful: Words we wouldn't normally associate with a high-energy workout for seniors. Advertising agencies and Hollywood have sold us on the idea that the intensity and personality of the instructor is a measure of the quality of a workout. Flashy sets, Hollywood glitter, punchy music, and celebrity endorsements have been the selling points for exercise programs. We have been trained to measure their worth on these things. As if the eye candy they sell will flatten your abs and tighten your butt.

Why is this? It has to do with our fast food culture. Fast paced lives have created a need for fast everything. Instant mash, instant results, easier, no thinking required, five minutes a day, five easy steps mentality pervades our society. We have become the McDonalds generation.

Fortunately, this trend is changing, at least when it comes to exercise. While Hollywood will still have it's way with the masses, there are many who are searching and finding a better way. Exercise programs, which are based upon quality of motion and mindfulness of the body, are seeing a huge resurgence. While most of them have been around for a very long time, there are also many new programs, which have adapted the principals of the old with the needs of today. They all have two things in common; they are gentle on the body and they are mindful, integrating the mind with the body.

Faster, harder, feel the burn, no pain no gain. Working your body in this way may not be the best way. There are hundreds of programs out there, which are completely based upon this mentality. These programs have no room for being overweight, having pre-existing injuries or general wear and tear of everyday life. No real attention to form, only a celebrity cheerleader pushing you ever harder. Not much mindfulness here, no real emphasis on preserving the body and motions, which are natural to it. Only a push it harder attitude. While this attitude is part of a great workout, it is not the total answer, only a small part.

To really enhance a workout, one must be mindful of what they are doing. This is a skill, which few possess. It is a strange thing and something that most people do not realize. People are just not aware of their bodies. This becomes evident as a lack of coordination or a propensity for injury. We are truly not aware of what each part of our body is doing until properly trained to do so. Without this skill, we cannot get the most from our bodies and from our workouts. Mindfulness will strengthen the muscles needed for balance and support.

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Many ancient disciplines teach this skill. Martial arts, Yoga, Tai Chi, Chi Kung are all ancient arts, which deal with this. Cardio Karaticise, Power Yoga, NIA, and Pilate's are programs, which have adapted principles from these ancient disciplines. Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, Breema, and Somatics are fairly modern day programs which utilize the principle of mindfulness although they may call it different things.

Of these, let's look at those that focus on using ancient principles to develop a modern day workout.

The martial arts based aerobics systems, Power Yoga, NIA, and Pilate's.

Martial arts aerobics systems have hit the mainstream. They've been practiced for a long time in martial arts studios, but a major marketing campaign has brought a few of them into the public eye.

Martial arts in general are divided into two main categories, hard and soft. Since martial arts are divided into these categories, the aerobics programs based upon them will also be divided in this way.

Both are fantastic workouts but you must be careful with hard style. Hard style martial arts aerobics

such as Tae Bo and Kardio Kickbox, which are typically based upon Japanese and Okinawan systems, can be very high impact and can wear on the joints. Since a lot of stretching and preconditioning is necessary for these martial arts, the same should be done for their aerobic counterparts. These are not programs that should be done by the elderly. There is a high risk of injury associated with these even in those that are athletic.

Soft style martial arts aerobics are based on Kung Fu, Chinese martial arts. These arts tend to be more fluid and are therefore more gentle on the body. However, because they use the same muscle groups, they still produce an intense workout if done properly. These take a little longer to learn but are very worthwhile. Cardio Karaticise is a good example of a Kung fu based aerobic.

This is a great program for the elderly. Because of the soft nature of the exercise there is very little risk of injury. Because of the circular flowing motion, there is little strain on the joints. The horse stance, which is used throughout Cardio Karaticise, will develop all of the leg muscles. The muscles surrounding the knee are developed which will support the joint taking much of the strain of everyday life off of the joint. The gluteus maximus muscles are focused on. Strengthening these muscles will develop stability and balance and tend to straighten the body creating a better centerline.

Centerline is a principle inherent in only a few disciplines. It simply means that the spine remains erect through all movements. This takes the strain off of the back and teaches us to use our back properly. I have seen many with bad backs who have if not completely fixed the problem, they have learned to control it and not move in a way that would injure the spine.

Not only will centerline help the back, but also help with balance. Finding one's own center greatly enhances balance. When kicks are done, a person always comes to center first when practicing properly. This practice will teach to constantly adjust center to a balanced position, further developing balance.

There is a lot of important footwork in Cardio Karaticise. Again, it will take a little longer to learn but is essential to a safe, effective workout. The footwork in Cardio Karaticise teaches to push from the ground rather than lifting the foot. This again increases balance and strength and teaches one to be more purposeful. When a person lifts the foot, it tends to slightly pull off of balance. When the foot is pushed from the ground it maintains balance. This difference can be seen in watching different people walk. Watch someone who is purposeful in their action, they push from the ground when they walk. Creating a fast stride. Other people trudge. A trudge is really a series of fall and catch. There is no forward push, more of an up and down. This takes a lot of energy with little result and creates a great deal of impact. As personality and mood are evident in body motion and posture, the opposite is true

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also. Body motion and posture can affect personality and mood. If a person mimics the body motion and posture of a personality trait, eventually he will possess that attitude or personality trait. For good or bad. Ever hear of having a spring in your step?

Power Yoga, while not a high intensity cardiovascular workout, has many benefits. Since the original intent of yoga itself was to achieve a state of mindfulness which brings on a state of unity. The breath is used to draw attention to whatever is being done at the moment. Because of this you will tend to leave your stress behind. Being mindful of what is taking place will not allow you to have thoughts of the day's trials and tribulations. Power Yoga will give you greater flexibility, endurance and strength and is fantastic stress relief.

Pilate's, originally called "contrology", is the creation of German immigrant Joseph Pilates. It was created as a rehabilitation exercise. Pilate's became very popular among New York dancers. Pilate's is a method of exercise, which utilizes the full range of motion of the muscle. Very beneficial in creating long sinewy muscles. The exercise begins as mat work, similar in many ways to Yoga. It then progresses to machines designed to promote elongated muscle growth, Very beneficial in developing great muscle tone.

Nia is an eclectic, artful form of exercise. It incorporates principles of Martial arts, dance, healing arts and self-expression. NIA, which stands for Neuromuscular Integrative Action, is developed to fit the

instructor's personality and can be very free form. Its goal is to connect oneself, or to integrate the entire body and mind.

There are many forms of mindful exercise, explore them and find what is right for you. An index of links to sites that specialize in gentle forms of exercise and healing arts can be found at

http://www.karaticise.com/gentle_exercise/links/

Phil Weaver, the author, is the co-creator of the kung fu based aerobics video, Cardio Karaticise. He is also a full time Kung Fu instructor. He and His wife Liz Weaver operate a Kung Fu school in Burson Ca, which teaches authentic Mandarin Kung Fu called Shou' Shu', They offer free lessons on how to properly do martial arts based aerobics program, while minimizing the risk of injury at their website <http://www.karaticise.com/>

Dial M for Mindfulness: Using the Golden Arches

By Maya Talisman Frost

Looking for mindfulness? Who ya gonna call?

Try dialing M.

It's easy to be mindful. It's just hard to remember to be mindful. That's why it's so important to pick our triggers.

Here's a great trigger for mindfulness—the letter M. I'm a great fan of the letter M. For me, it stands for mindfulness, meditation, mediation and mind massage. It's soothing to say: "Mmmmmmm." Add an H and you're thinking: "Hmmmmmm." Add an O and you're chanting: "Ommmmmmmm." It's hard to go

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wrong with M.

Okay, but in the course of your day, with all the M-words you hear, say and see, how can you possibly remember to be mindful each time? You can't. That's why you need to choose ONE M for your mindfulness trigger, and I've got the perfect one: the McDonald's golden arches.

No, really. Think about it. You've already got your own ideas about McDonald's. Maybe you love McDonald's food. Maybe you appreciate the convenience of a drive-thru breakfast when you're on the road. Maybe you hate its corporate identity. Maybe you've seen "Super-Size Me" and all you can think about is poor Morgan Spurlock getting hypertension in his month-of-McDonald's-food experiment. Maybe you feel guilty that you like McDonald's food. Maybe you feel upset that you feel guilty.

Whether you love to hate McDonald's or hate to love it, those golden arches are a complex trigger. It's time for a little piggybacking—intentionally superimposing a new concept on an already loaded one.

Here's how it works: The first time each day that you see the McDonald's golden arches—the sign itself, the logo on a paper bag, an image on a television commercial—simply say, "I am mindful." That's it.

No need to spin your stories. You don't have to get involved in any mental arguments. There's no reason to get caught up in any emotion. Just use it as a trigger to be mindful.

By saying this phrase—"I am mindful"—you are actually starting a complex process in your brain. You are creating a powerful link to a visual image, and taking control of what it does for you. You are building a self-fulfilling prophecy—if you notice the golden arches, then you are indeed mindful.

Since being mindful is not something you normally associate with McDonald's, it serves as a sort of balancing mechanism. Because the only emotion associated with mindfulness is a calm sense of paying attention, you can strip McDonald's of its "good" and "bad" properties and just note it without judgment.

This is what mindfulness is all about. By picking a trigger that is ubiquitous, you are automatically

giving yourself plenty of opportunities to include this brief mindful moment in your day.

You will find that you will begin to be mindful every time you see the golden arches. That might expand to other images of your choice—the Coca-Cola logo, the Disney logo, Starbucks, whatever. Choose something you can't avoid, and take advantage of it.

Take comfort in taking control of your mind.

Mmmmmm. I'm lovin' it.

Maya Talisman Frost is a mind masseuse offering specialized mindfulness training in Portland, Oregon. Her work has inspired thinkers in over 90 countries. To subscribe to her free weekly ezine, the Friday Mind Massage, please visit

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Dial M for Mindfulness: Using the Golden Arches
Savoring Moments Through Mindful Eating
Is God Trying To Tell You Something
Emotional Expression: An EQ Competency
A Bellyful of Mindfulness

Control your Headache!
Gag Gifting.
Competition Commando
Software Empire
The Forum List



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