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The Nia Techniqueⁱ

Overview

The Nia Technique is based on The Body's Way and incorporates 9 movement energies, 13 primary principles, and 52 basic moves.

Students learn the technique of Nia in classes, through books and videotapes, and in workshops or student/teacher intensive training. Improvement in technique comes from practice that promotes growth out of love and ease rather than pain and effort.

Nia gives people of all ages and fitness levels tools to explore their own bodies and the ways they move. Students are given the space and time to explore, perceive, and refine their movements in order to experience greater ease and pleasure. Through the practice of Nia's time-tested technique, the body, mind, emotions, and spirit transform - changing and growing to reach the personal potential set by each individual. People are encouraged to develop in their own way and in their own time within a community group exercise environment.

The Body's Way

Everything you do in Nia supports the design and function of the body.

The Body's Way is a method of moving according to the body's specific design and structure. With The Body's Way, we honor this design and structure and allow it to guide our movement.

For example, by looking at the bones of the feet, The Body's Way reveals that the architecture of the feet is designed to distribute and spread body weight evenly. They are designed to bear weight over a finely designed base with arches that are strong and flexible. By design, the feet are in relationship with the ankle joint so that together they can create an adaptable system for efficiency in movement and in stability.

Nia's way is always in alignment with the body. When you begin to understand The Body's Way you will start to forge a new relationship with your own body. You will learn how to get optimum power, propulsion, fitness and flexibility, without pain. Your movement choices will change, and they will no longer be based on habit but on structural and experiential validation.

Your Body's Way

Your Body's Way is the current design and function of your own body.

The Body's Way represents the absolute pinnacle of proper physical function. It means using the body with faultless efficiency and dynamic ease. It means achieving consummate balance, the perfect mix of mobility and stability, and an unparalleled blend of yin and yang energies. Mastering The Body's Way is a fantastic goal – but like all other forms of perfection, this goal is unattainable much of the time. Therefore, in Nia, we emphasize moving in accord with not only The Body's Way, but also with Your Body's Way, gradually learning to adapt and merge it with The Body's Way.

Often, Nia students regularly achieve The Body's Way in some of their movements but fall short in others. This does not mean that these students are failing. It simply means that The Body's Way is an ongoing process and that Nia is an ongoing practice.

13 Principles

The 13 principles are at the heart of Nia.

The thirteen primary principles of Nia are the foundation of the practice and provide a framework for experiencing fitness as personal growth. They are the tools you use to get fit, stay healthy, and make lifestyle changes. Take the time to become physically intimate with each principle, and your Nia practice will soar to new heights!

Principle 1: The Joy of Movement

Joy is the primary sensation to seek from all movement. If you momentarily lose joy, *tweak* your movement until joy arises again.

Principle 2: Natural Time and The Movement Forms

All of your Nia movements are done in your own personal, natural sense of time and include movements and energy from nine classic movement forms.

Principle 3: Music and the 8-BC System

Nia is practiced to the silence and sound of music, using an 8-beat counting system to organize the movements and connect to the resonance of a variety of musical landscapes.

Principle 4: FreeDance

Anything goes, movement-wise, freedance allows us to let go of structure. The FreeDance system is an eight-stage movement process that stimulates creativity.

Principle 5: Awareness and Dancing Through Life

In Nia, you become aware that every movement in life is a part of your dance and that each and every movement can be used to self-heal.

Principle 6: The Base – The Feet and Legs

Your feet are the hands that touch the earth, and through your legs they carry the energy of the earth to your whole body. The Base is the foundation of all movement.

Principle 7: The Three Planes and Three Levels

Every movement can be done within three planes – low, middle, and high – and can be done in three different levels of intensity. Mixing the three levels and three planes creates a wide repertoire of movement choices.

Principle 8: The Core – Pelvis, Chest, and Head

These three body weights are the home of your emotions and energy centers. The pelvis is a container of energy, the chest transmits and receives energy, and the head processes energy. Connection to the core of the body enables you to consciously circulate and increase energy.

Principle 9: The Upper Extremities – The Arms, Hands, and Fingers

The upper extremities are tools used to heal, touch, direct energy, and create connections. They are extensions of your feelings and thoughts, and allow you to express yourself in personal and purposeful ways.

Principle 10: X-ray Anatomy

X-Ray Anatomy is the practice of using your eyes, other sensory organs, and intuition to “see” within. You can penetrate the veil of your flesh to reveal the proper placement of your bones, tendons, ligaments, and muscles, and then use this information to self-heal.

Principle 11: Fitness is the Business of the Body

Fitness can be achieved by listening to the voices of the body by setting goals, creating plans, and attaining results. Achieving success is a process of conscious change.

Principle 12: Continuing Your Body-Mind-Spirit Education

Healing the body is a practice that never ends. Every new workout is an opportunity to re-educate your body, mind, and spirit.

Principle 13: Dance What You Sense

When you experience the primary lesson of Nia – that life should be lived through sensation – you become connected.

The Workout

Nia is a workout delivered in 7 cycles, utilizing 52 moves and 9 movement energies.

Nia combines dance movements and heart-pumping martial arts moves infused with subtle therapeutic techniques designed to heighten body awareness and Sensory IQ. The Nia workout is generally performed in bare feet and, through the use of music and movement, each Nia experience is uniquely crafted to both calm and invigorate. A Nia workout delivers cardiovascular and whole body conditioning for the body, mind, emotions and spirit.

7 Cycles

The Body's Way reminds us that everything in nature moves in cycles to maintain harmony and balance.

The Nia workout moves through seven cycles, each designed to deliver specific results. While the basic moves remain the same, your experience changes based on how you adjust your focus, speed, intensity, and overall intent. Your ability to remain aware and responsive to your body's ever-changing needs will enable you to receive maximum benefit each time you workout.

Cycle 1: Focus and Intent - "What You Place Your Attention On"

Choose a focus and intent. Your *intent* describes what you personally desire to achieve, while your *focus* defines where you will place your attention in order to achieve the intent. *Example: "Today I will focus on the feet in order to enhance the sensation of stability in the body."* In a class setting, your teacher will provide the focus and intent for each workout. You are encouraged to personalize it to fit your specific needs.

Cycle 2: Step In - "Create the Space to Workout"

Step In to create the space. Prepare physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, by stepping in, centering, and getting ready to work out. Leave behind all distractions and activate your body's sensory awareness as the starting point for all action.

Cycle 3: Warm Up - "Prepare Your Heart, Lungs, and 13 Joints"

Warm up to sensation. Consciously activate the flow of energy in all 13 joints, increase body heat and respiration, and become aware of how your body is feeling. Sensory information guides how you workout; how you adapt the speed, intensity, range of motion; and how you work with the three planes and three levels.

Cycle 4: Get Moving - "Energize the Moves to Reach a Peak"

Energize and condition the body. Move in and through space at a higher level of intensity to stimulate the heart and lungs. Use movement energy and speed variety to condition the nervous system. For Athletic Nia, this cycle can include moving down and up from the floor.

Cycle 5: Cool Down - "Calm, Harmonize, and Re-center"

Slow down to re-center, balance, and harmonize the body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Prepare to move on the floor. Listen to the voices of your body that tell you what muscles and joints need more attention to bring balance and harmony to your body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

Cycle 6: FloorPlay - "Fitness on the Floor"

Use play, gravity, the floor, space, time, and sound to stimulate your body and improve strength and flexibility. Take advantage of the heat and pliability generated from the previous movement. Stretch and open up your joints more fully. Kneepads, carpeting, or mats are advised to help the body move in a free and relaxed way.

Cycle 7: Step Out - "Transition Into Your Next Activity"

Step out of the practice, and into the day. Consciously recognize through body sensation the self-healing and fitness benefits you have received. Purposefully and with intent, you physically step out and into your next experience relaxed and invigorated.

The 52 Moves

The 52 Moves are the building blocks of any Nia workout.

The 52 Moves consist of detailed body skills to train the body to become more aware, conscious, and efficient. Nia moves empower students to move as a whole with precision and grace, regardless of the speed. The moves are often activated in one body part (heels, ball of the foot, joints, knees, elbows, fingers, hands, head, eyes, voice) yet are experienced systemically. Every move can be experienced as a bold, dynamic movement or as a more subtle, slower movement. Energetic variation trains the body to become sensitive, enabling the body to move with a higher degree of power and mastery.

Experience Three Nia Moves that Deliver Fitness

Here are three basic Nia moves that demonstrate what we call *functional fitness*. Play and explore how your body feels right now. Move and seek pleasure.

Heel Lead

The aim of this base move is to help you connect to the earth through your feet to develop grounded movement.

Functionally, the heel lead is like walking, so you already know how to do this base move. Lead with the heel, when stepping forward or out to the side through various ranges of motion, you can move all around the room to gain conditioning for your heart, lungs and lower body, and all without stressing your bones or joints!

Visual: As you lead with your heel, imagine walking on a beach, feeling the sand beneath your feet and between your toes. As you step, imagine the toes of your feet growing longer and longer.

Whole Foot

When you step either up onto a step or onto the floor, be aware of how you use your whole foot.

Functionally you do this move all the time. Now, become consciously aware of your whole foot. Sense the outside edges of your feet and rest over the center. Walk and then stop. Rest and balance on the feet. Sense your body relax into them and let them support you from the ground up. Support is from underneath you.

Visuals: Imagine the floor underneath you is a sea of electrical sockets you can plug and unplug your feet into. Every time you take a step, plug your feet in and out of the energy sockets and draw more and more energy into your whole body with every step you take. When standing, rest and imagine your feet have long green roots growing from their soles that reach deep into the earth and receive energy from the Earth through your feet. To get up and out of a chair, use your whole foot and push down into the earth to rise.

Cat Stance

Stand in place, on one foot, and balance yourself as if you were poised to pounce.

Rest on the whole foot of one foot and lift the other foot off the floor, with your thigh at a level that demands you find balance. Use your hands and arms to help you center. Keep the knee and hip joint of your supporting leg soft and spring loaded and keep your hips level.

Visuals: Imagine the foot you are on is 50 times bigger, and rest into your big foot base to find balance. Cat-like, move from the left foot to the right foot, sensing yourself as a cat, ready and alert. Alternate sides several times.

The 9 Movement Energies

Nia is inspired by nine unique movement disciplines. Infused with the spirit of martial arts, dance arts, and healing arts, Nia blends concepts from the East and West to deliver a richly diverse energy experience.

Martial Arts

Tai Chi

Nia moves inspired by Tai Chi focus on developing a relationship with your slow dance and learning to move from a lower center of gravity in the body, called the tan-tien - located two inches below the navel in the center of the pelvis. Moving from this center it is possible to develop sensory awareness and a nourishing energy relationship between your body and the world around you.

A Nia Tai Chi experience involves circular, elegant and soft movements, reminiscent of swimming in water. This fluidity gives definition to the body without the use of external weights and slowly and gently increases your range of motion. Coordinating arm, eye, and hand motions with the whole body creates graceful systemic movement without causing strain to the skeletal system. Moving slowly provides conditioning for the legs and increases flexibility. The energy of Tai Chi maximizes efficiency by using the basic locomotive move of leading with the heel and shifting body weight rather than dropping it.

Tae Kwon Do

Nia moves inspired by Tae Kwon Do place an emphasis on precision and on developing organic skill, the perfect balance between moving naturally while mechanically perfecting your technique.

A Nia Tae Kwon Do experience includes arm blocks, punches, thrusts, kicks, hand techniques, and the use of sound. Circular movements become powerful, directed, linear actions in an instant. Speed changes challenge quick and slow twitch muscle fibers and improve your strength, agility, mobility, stability, and overall coordination. The martial art stances, kicks, core, and hand and arm techniques are a cornerstone in the foundation of Nia choreography that makes it possible to receive cardiovascular benefits without repetitive jogging and jumping up and down. Learning to work from a place of dynamic control and balance, you benefit from the energy that flows and directs your body with internal physical, mental, emotional and spiritual power.

Aikido

Nia moves inspired by Aikido follow the path and way of harmony, as in harmonious spherical motion. 'Ai' means to meet, 'ki' meaning spirit and 'Do' meaning the way - in other words, the way of harmony.

A Nia Aikido experience encourages you to energetically blend your body with space, music, breath, time, with other people... with everything! You learn to focus and consciously direct your energy, which allows your energy to flow freely and your whole body to move more powerfully and elegantly.

Dance Arts

Jazz

Nia moves inspired by Jazz encourage fun, showmanship and spontaneous self-expression while balancing muscle strength and flexibility, making it possible to move quickly while isolating joints and body parts.

A Nia Jazz experience encourages body symmetry while isolating individual body parts. Moves from Jazz, such as the cha cha, shakes, the shimmy, and hip bumps make the Nia experience fun and sensual.

Duncan Dance

Nia moves inspired by Duncan Dance seduce you to move in free-spirited ways that integrate both graceful and beautiful full-body expression.

A Nia Duncan Dance experience encourages an unrestricted and uninhibited flow of emotion and motion. Attention to up and out energy flow balances the downward pull of gravity, which helps to keep the posture of the body aligned and balanced. Leg strength is built through the integration of the relève, lyrical momentum, and pauses, creating a unique conversation with the space - rising to the sky and surrendering back to the floor. Calf and leg muscles develop a beautiful shape through the gentle mechanics of opening up the front of the ankle, groin and torso on rising motions.

Modern Dance

Nia moves inspired by Modern Dance creatively get you to play in space with your body, creating shapes in space, falling on and off balance, and being dramatic and elusively emotional.

A Nia Modern Dance experience provides the space to play and create within the Nia moves, tapping into body language that is both physically and emotionally satisfying. As you learn to play and create body shapes in space your body becomes more comfortable at being on and off balance. Free expansive movement leads the way for increased strength and flexibility in the whole body. Changing directions keeps the vestibular system healthy, making it easy for your brain to give you information about your body movement and help control your balance and equilibrium.

Healing Arts

Yoga

Nia moves inspired by Yoga take the emphasis off of muscle and place it on creating comfort by sensing bone and joint alignment.

A Nia Yoga experience teaches you to maintain volume and space inside by positioning bones and joints so that the body is continually encouraged to open up and free itself of unwanted tension. Opening the body becomes a way of making space in and around the joints. Lengthening and feeling the sensation of flexibility - your energy moving out and along the bones - teaches you to stretch in a way that respects muscle attachments. Looking inward, sensing your body as you move, enhances an ongoing awareness of purposeful bone alignment that makes moving into most any yoga posture a natural process.

The Work of Moshe Feldenkrais

Nia moves inspired by the work of Moshe Feldenkrais focus on connecting to body sensations, in *motion and in stillness*.

A Nia Feldenkrais based experience focuses on moving slowly and quickly while noticing sensations and feelings with the whole body. Awareness of your movement is how you help create permanent changes in your body that improve function and pleasure. You learn to place your conscious and sensory attention on breath, voice, circulation, sight, smell, sound, touch, taste, orientation to space, time and rhythm, as well as physical feelings associated with emotions.

The Alexander Technique

Nia moves inspired by The Alexander Technique focus on redirecting your movement from the top - the head - to help shift stereotyped response patterns that create inefficient postural habits.

A Nia Alexander Technique experience gives you the power to change the way you move and hold your body by redirecting the use of the head in a 'forward and up' relationship to the neck and torso. Proper use of the head and neck is primary in developing integrated body movement. The practice of allowing the back to lengthen and widen, and learning how to move as a whole person are just some of the self-healing techniques inspired in this amazing body of work.

ⁱ Compiled ca. 2006 by Lia Kidoguchi from information previously available at [The Nia Technique](http://www.niaonline.com) website <http://www.nianow.com> which has since been updated.