



"What Nia students have in common is their desire to move."

BY CULLEN CURTISS

Fluid Fitness

A nontraditional approach to health through movement.



"It takes a certain amount of courage to do anything with your body that's marketed as expressive."

Instead of mechanical "no pain, no gain" exercises, Nia (neuromuscular integrative action) encourages conscious, sensual movements. Drawing from the wisdom of three dance forms (jazz, modern and Isadora Duncan dance), three martial arts (Tae Kwon Do, Aikido and Tai Chi) and three healing arts (Feldenkrais, the Alexander Technique and yoga), Nia empowers the exercise participant and encourages an experience of joy and self-healing. "We built the dance form Nia on the design and map of the body," says Debbie Rosas, who, along with her husband Carlos, created this unique type of exercise.

Considered an advanced form of fitness fusion and adaptable to every fitness level, Nia is a cardiovascular program that uses expressive movement applied to music. While the choreography helps to create imagery, the music supports movement with melodies that can be lyrical, pulsing, or triumphant, and always powerful. Moreover, participants are often encouraged to use their voices. "Sound is another form of expression and stimulation," says Carlos.

"By incorporating one-legged, off-and-on balance Tai Chi exercises into its routines, Nia has been shown to be successful in retarding bone loss and preventing falls."

For more information on the Nia Technique, visit www.nianow.com or pick up *The Nia Technique: The High-Powered Energizing Workout That Gives You a New Body and a New Life* by Debbie and Carlos Rosas (Broadway, 2005).

Cullen Curtiss is a freelance writer living in Santa Fe, N.M. Her work has appeared in *Outside* magazine, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, the *Santa Fean* magazine and a variety of other publications. She has an MFA from St. Mary's College of California, where she founded *in-tense*, a literary journal. She spends her free time outside or on her novel, *The Garden of Eva*. Visit www.cullencurtiss.com.

A Nia class scene is simultaneously playful and intense. While moving, participants smile confidently and laugh out loud, following the teacher's patterns to the best of their desires and abilities. When commanded to be vocal, a sonorous chorus of voices expresses the sound within all their hearts.

MOVING TO MUSIC
Nia offers a comprehensive approach to body-mind-spirit training that makes devotees out of students and teachers alike. "I love that we can attract and help such a variety of people. Side by side, you'll see an 80-year-old man, a 20-year-old girl, a pregnant woman, someone with fibromyalgia, someone with multiple sclerosis, and someone in a wheelchair," says Debbie.

GROWING INTO ITS OWN
Nia has been presented at more than 12 IDEA conventions, numerous mind-body conventions, and is recognized as an ACE and AFAA continuing education course provider. You can find Nia offered for college credit in dance and drama departments around the world. It is available in prisons, drug and cardiac rehabilitation centers, health clubs, martial art studios, mind-body spas and wellness centers.

NIA'S SEVEN CYCLES

Each workout moves through a series of seven cycles and 52 moves, which are the building blocks of every Nia workout, and deliver particular results based on individual focus, speed, intensity and overall intent. "State of grace" for instance, focuses on moving the arms and hands to get connected to the heart. In "The Dance," comprised of a series of songs by musical artist George Michael, the feet are the focus and the intent is to become aware of the base and enhance the sensation of stability in the body.

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Focus and Intent. Choose where you want to place your attention in order to achieve your goal.

Step In. Prepare for the workout by physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually stepping into it. Leave behind all distractions.

Warm Up. Become aware of how your body is feeling when you activate the flow of energy in your joints and increase your body heat and respiration.

Get Moving. Move at a higher level of intensity to stimulate the heart and lungs. You can move up and down from the floor—the speed condition the nervous system.

Cool Down. Slow movement down to re-center the body and prepare to move to the floor.

Floor Play. Keep movement free and relaxed. Stretch and open up your joints more fully using play, gravity, the floor and sound.

Step Out. Step out of the exercise and transition into your next experience relaxed and invigorated.

NIA TO COMBAT HEALTH THREATS

Dr. Kern is an internationally acclaimed speaker in the field of health sciences and a black belt Nia teacher. Long interested in how the body reacts to different forms of fitness, she published a paper in 1997 showing how the Nia approach to cardiovascular exercise resulted in improved mental states. She perfect sense," says Minkin.

about it as fluid instead, and that made wondered if the movement was too feminine. "But Holly told me to think a few men in Curtiss' class and at first he

MUSIC FOR ANY BODY
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NIA FOR LIFE
"It is life-changing work," says 13-year veteran Nia teacher Holly Curtiss, based in Santa Fe, N.M. "I always say 'Nia through my 90s.'" While attending college in the early 1990s, Curtiss went to an IDEA conference and found herself rapt when presenter Dr. Deborah Kern described her personal experiences with Nia training. "She talked about this whole way of moving that was more sensory-based, more circular," says Curtiss.

Now teaching 12 Nia classes a week, Curtiss is a prolific trainer of first-degree white belt students. Similar to martial arts, Nia participants earn four belts as they master movement—white, blue, brown and black. Curtiss is among 1,500 instructors throughout the world teaching Nia, and there are more than 30,000 students. "What Nia students have in common is their desire to move," says Curtiss. "But it takes a certain amount of courage to do anything with your body that's marketed as expressive. If they stay, it transforms."

Jordan Minkin, 46, says his body had "gotten fused" after repeat injuries and working daily at the computer. "My bothersome shoulder felt better after just five weeks of Nia." Owner of an unlimited monthly pass, Minkin is one of