Health & Wellness
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Today
May 2009
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Coffee, Tea, & Ice Cream
White Tea
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Why Chess Should Be a Part of Every Child's Education
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Photo - Brad Harrison

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Eat Your Sunshine

By Michelle Pfennighaus

Do you know what the #1 vegetable in the American diet is? Potatoes. That's right. And how do we most often eat potatoes? As french fries. You got it.

No wonder we as a country are overweight, sick and tired. Not to knock the potato, but there are lots of wonderful vegetables to fill our plates with that give us more nourishment and energy than french fries ever could.

Let's talk about the vegetables we are most missing from our diets instead: dark, leafy greens. You know, the ones that wave at you from the supermarket produce section? They kind of all look the same? And they might give you terrible flashbacks to your mom's slimy, boiled side dishes?

Thank goodness you don't have to cook the way your mom did. Now is a great time to discover all the tasty and healthy ways you can prepare greens for you and your family in a totally non-slimy way!

There are a lot of reasons to dig into a big bowl of greens. For starters, they are full of vitamins, fiber and calcium. Did you hear that? Calcium! But wait, there's more. Dark, leafy veggies are super low in calorie density. So you can eat a whole head of kale and not feel one ounce of remorse. (If you think I'm crazy to suggest eating that much kale, I'll change your mind with the recipe at the end of this article.)

Finally, the reason I love to eat greens is because they are full of the sun's uplifting energy. Leaves full of chlorophyll grow upward and absorb the sun's energy to fuel photosynthesis. Dark leafy greens are recommended for respiratory health because of their unique function in the plant world.

Photo: Margan Zajdowicz

My clients always tell me that they simply don't know how to prepare greens. Here are some ways you can experiment with more sunshine-y greens into your diet:

Go raw

Lots of greens can be eaten raw as part of a salad. The secret is to slice them very thin and allow the leaves to marinate for a few minutes in a vinegar-based dressing. Try swiss chard, kale or even shredded brussels sprouts mixed with your favorite lettuce and salad fixins'. Get a recipe for Kale Confetti Salad at www.findyourbalancehealth.com/2009/04/diy-cooking-club.

Cook 'em quick

I like to heat some oil and garlic in a pan, then throw in chopped spinach or kale just long enough for it to start to wilt. A squeeze of lemon and dash of red chili pepper and you're done. More time to watch Idol!

Hide them in other foods

A-ha! This is my favorite. If you don't want to make a whole meal or side dish of greens, don't worry. You can sneak them into pretty much any recipe. Meatloaf? Add 1 cup of finely chopped watercress to the meat mixture. Chili? Check out my white chili recipe that uses napa cabbage. Very, very sneaky. www.findyourbalancehealth.com/2009/04/diy-cooking-club.

Green snacks are great

I like to use collard leaves as wraps for a hummus snack. Chop off the stem and roll! Or, how about blanched broccoli as a crisp snack that you can bring to the office? Finally, here is the recipe I promised you at the beginning of this article. My husband loves when I make these. Enjoy!

Kale Chips

1 head kale (try green curly or dinosaur kale)
1-2 Tbl. olive oil
salt, pepper, and seasoning of your choice

Preheat oven to 375. Wash and shake kale leaves dry. Tear away from the stems and into bite sized pieces. In a large bowl, combine kale with oil, salt and pepper. You can also add parmesan cheese, cayenne pepper, ground coriander, nutritional yeast…the variations are up to you! Mix well to evenly coat. Place chips in a single layer on cookie sheets, sprinkle again with seasoning, and bake for 13-15 minutes or until crisp. That's it! These are so good, you may just eat the whole batch yourself. MLT

Michelle Pfennighaus is a holistic health counselor and registered

yoga instructor based in Boston, MA. For many years she suffered from debilitating anxiety and digestive disorders until finally healing herself through changes in diet and lifestyle.

Michelle received training from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition and a 200 hour yoga teacher program. Currently, she is works with clients all over the country to improve their health and happiness. She also offers cooking classes and workshops for groups.

To learn more about Michelle, visit her website www.FindYourBalanceHealth.com.

By Kirk Fontaine

Dealing With Stress
A Man's Perspective

We all live in a world of stressful events and it depends on how you deal with those events. We can blame the lack of control we now have over our livelihood, we can blame the economy, natural disasters, diseases or just people. So then what is the best way to deal with all those stressors. That would be the question of the day.

I can tell you from my perspective stress is hard and challenging to the mind and body. I can only tell you about my experiences with stressors. From my perspective as a male who has had quite a few major stressors in the last 5 years, including my prostate cancer scare on St. Patty Day 2007. This sparked a passionate energy that I did not know I had. My last article in the April 2007 issue highlighted my experience.

This leads in to my other passion concerning the emotional and physical health of males. I don't claim to be an expert so this is my personal perspective. Professional therapy or counseling was not a word used in my family growing up. We worked our problems inside the family circle. I am a youngest of three boys in a single parent home

In the 60's, most research on dealing with stress from a professional perspective was not as advanced as it is now. So that was then - this is now and professional therapy has become my best friend to deal with my stressors and it has and will be always a part of my life even after I conclude my sessions. I have incorporated those principles over a 10-year period and within the last 5 years I have learned more about myself then I ever knew in the 47 years I have been here on Earth.

I have discussed this with a few people who have had similar circumstances and they have not considered professional therapy and they were men, not many, but just enough to make me wonder if men choose this option of dealing with stress or they go with the traditional and alternative methods that are most popular these days Examples, exercise, vitamin, mineral and herbal supplementation.

Here is an excerpt from my personal blog dated Jan18, 2009:

The frigid temperatures have hindered my drive even more than before-challenging my low state of motivation. Inconsistency seems to be my middle name. It has been an issue in my life ever since I started working. I found out later it was from depression that has been repressed for as long as I can remember. Behavioral and cognitive therapy has been also a part of my recovery-without it I think things would be drastically different.

I am not condoning those methods but what if these methods fail to mitigate your stressors then what are your options? Professional Therapy is Challenging and Painful but believe me it saved my life. MLT

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One Picture

Drawing

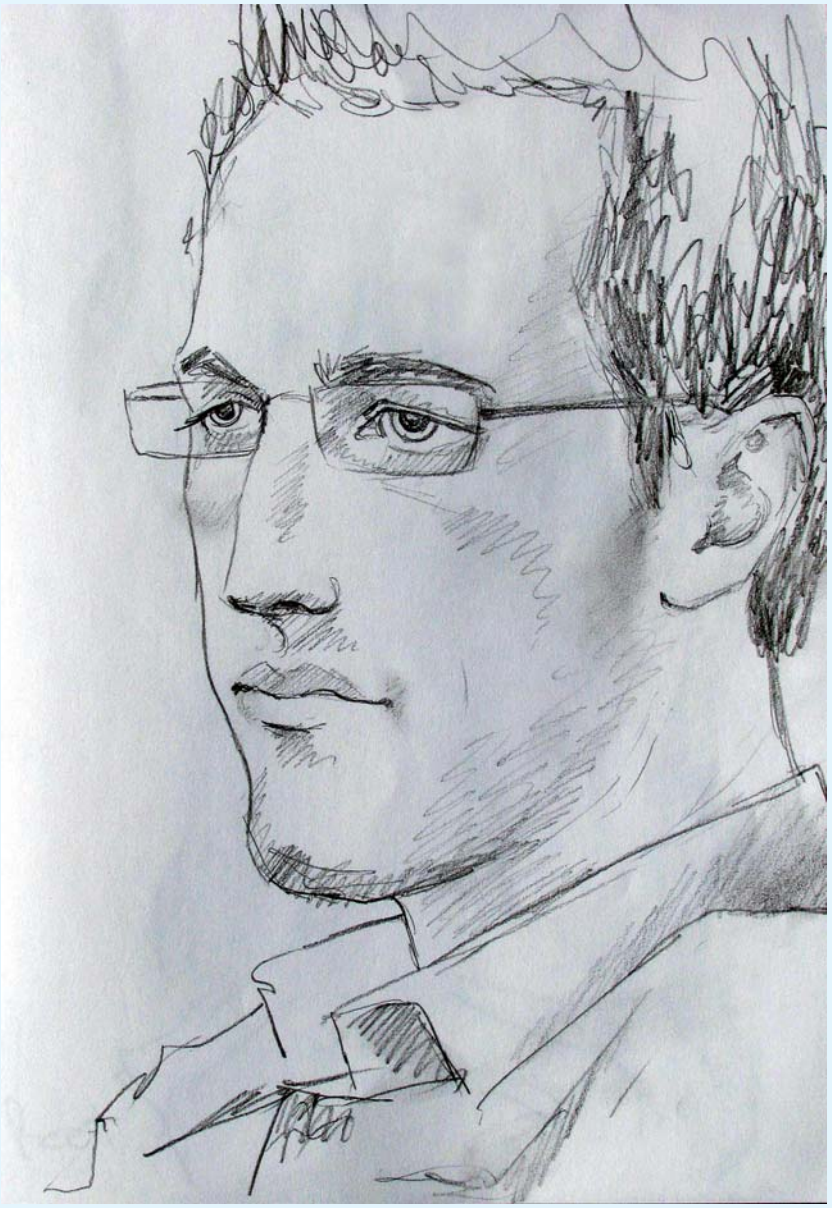
By Cassia Leidigh

Drawing is the basis for most two dimensional artwork, but especially for the portrait. So much of a person's expression can be captured with just the suggestion of a line in the right place. A crisp line can draw our attention to a certain part of an artwork that otherwise would go unnoticed. I love beautifully shaped lines, angles, and smooth flowing shapes that make up faces.

In my drawing "Scott" I have used more line work than shading to describe the face. I especially enjoy using this technique. It is not as fastidious and encourages freedom of expression. Even if a line or shape is not completely representative of what is actually seen by the artist, if it captures the general idea of the person or object it has fulfilled its purpose. It has described the essence of the subject.

One of my favorite artists, Elizabeth Payton, uses much line work in her paintings. She paints portraits of well known people before they became famous. Her work is very colorful and expressive. I highly recommend her book entitled Elizabeth Payton as an interesting addition for the coffee table. MLT

To see more of Cassia's artwork visit the Fix coffee shop located at 101 Wade Hampton Blvd, Greenville, SC 29609 or view her portfolio at www.cassialeidigh.com



By George Clements

Greenville Area Home Styles

When doing a search through available homes on the Greenville market, I found that seven styles seem to be the most prominent in the Greenville area. The seven most prominent I found are Traditional, Ranch, Bungalow, Contemporary, Colonial, Victorian, and Cape Cod.

The Traditional style is used more than any other to describe homes on the Greenville market, however, it is really hard to put a definition on Traditional style. Traditional can be a label put on a mix of different classical American styles or to some people it can even be used to describe other styles like Colonial, Georgian, or Cape Cod. Traditional is a very safe label when a home does not have an obvious style.

The Ranch Style is the second most prominent used to describe homes on the Greenville market. Ranch homes were most popular in the 50's and 60's. Common features include pitched-roof, picture window, brick exterior walls, and built-in garage or car port. Ranches are one story homes that are usually not as open in floor plan as homes built today and most of the Ranch style homes in Greenville are on crawl spaces with a small number on basements.

Photo: Lonnie Bradley

The Bungalow style is not quite as popular as the ranch but could be used to describe a number of homes on the Greenville market. Bungalows were most popular on the East Coast in the early 1900's. They are usually one story, rectangle shaped, narrow homes that do not have an attached garage and are smaller in size. The Bungalow is considered a forerunner of the Craftsman style.

Contemporary, Colonial, Victorian, and Cape Cod styles are sprinkled throughout the Greenville market, but just remember, if you are not sure, call it Traditional.

If you ever want to see a wide range of styles in the Greenville area with historical significance, just take drive down Hampton and Pinckney Streets near Downtown. There you will find everything from Queen Anne (Victorian) and Craftsman to Gothic Revival, Colonial Revival, and Italianate. For a copy of the walking tour visit: http://www.greenvillesc.gov/neighborhoods/hamp-pinck_tour.pdf MLT

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By Frank Canna

A Necessity, Not a Luxury

Yes it's true, more and more car owners are beginning to realize what most long time detailing customers have know all along; car detailing is a necessity, not a luxury.

Sure, some people still think getting your car detailed means going above and beyond what the average vehicle requires. Basically, the idea of keeping your car looking like new is no different than taking care of any other routine preventative maintenance, such as, making sure your oil is changed on a regular basis. Of course, there was a time long ago when professional automobile detailing services were not as readily available like they are today.

What changed?

One thing that changed is the fact that most people are now hanging on to their cars a lot longer than ever before. Talk to some older folks and you'll quickly find out that a few decades ago it was a common occurrence for people to go out and buy a new car about every three or four years. Fast forward to today's economic climate, where people now buy a new car about every nine or ten years and you'll begin to get a better idea of what's going on in the auto industry and how it affects each and every one of us today.

According to the U.S. Dept. of Transportation, statistics clearly show a downward trend in new car sales that actually began more than twenty years ago. And the worst part is the biggest drop in new cars sales actually occurred in the last ten years. When you factor in that the average price of a new car has more than doubled from $12,000 twenty years ago to more than $25,000 today, it's easy to begin to understand why there are fewer new cars on the road.

Photo: Dawn Allynn

Since the majority of car owners are now keeping their cars longer than ever before, they are also beginning to realize how important it is for them to make sure things are being maintained and not just the mechanical things, like tune-ups and filter changes. It is becoming clearer that the motoring public is finally beginning to understand and slowly focusing in on the real, money saving benefits of maintaining the appearance of their vehicles.

Yes it's true. Car detailing has never been just a luxury. It has always been a necessity. And, there has never been a better time than now to protect your investment and either take care of it yourself or have your car detailed by a professional.

Okay, so you say your car gets washed every once in a while and that should be good enough.

Well, the truth is washing

your car really only loosens and removes a small amount of surface residue. Removing stubborn environmental contamination is a result of thorough polishing and waxing of the paint. And that's where having your car professionally detailed on a regular basis begins to pay big dividends. You see, not only does frequent polishing and waxing help remove potentially harmful surface contamination, the entire process also adds an extra layer of surface protection. And when you take into account that many of today's waxes and sealants are actually synthetic polymer products, the level of surface protection improves dramatically compared to old fashion car wax. All of this adds up to a better looking, longer lasting high-gloss shine.

Of course, there are a host of other benefits to having your car detailed on a regular basis, such as; cleaning and protecting interior vinyl and leather upholstery. Over time, these materials begin to slowly age and dry out due to over-exposure to the ultra violet rays of the sun and excessive summertime heat. Today's high tech vinyl and leather protectants are designed to replenish, restore and maintain the like new condition of these materials.

Just like your oil should be changed on a regular basis, your car needs to be thoroughly cleaned, polished and waxed at least twice a year. It's a good idea to get into a routine of taking care of the appearance of your car once in the spring to protect against the summer sun and again in the fall to protect against winter snow, ice and road salt. Of course, everything's relative. For garage kept cars that don't see a lot of daily exposure to the environment, once a year detailing is usually just about right. However, cars that are driven in all types of conditions on a daily basis usually require more frequent appearance care.

Let's face it, owning a car is not getting any cheaper and replacing it with a new car is even more expensive than ever. The key is to always plan ahead and maintain what you drive. Whether it's new or old, it needs to be maintained on a regular basis. And after all, it's much more fun to go cruisin' in a clean machine! MLT

Photo: Bryan Powell

Frank Canna has been in the detailing business for more than 20 years and is the owner of Mirror Finish Detailing, Williamstown, NJ. He can be reached at http://mysite.verizon.net/cannaorcanna@verizon.net and on Twitter: @mirrorfinish

By Laura Sherman

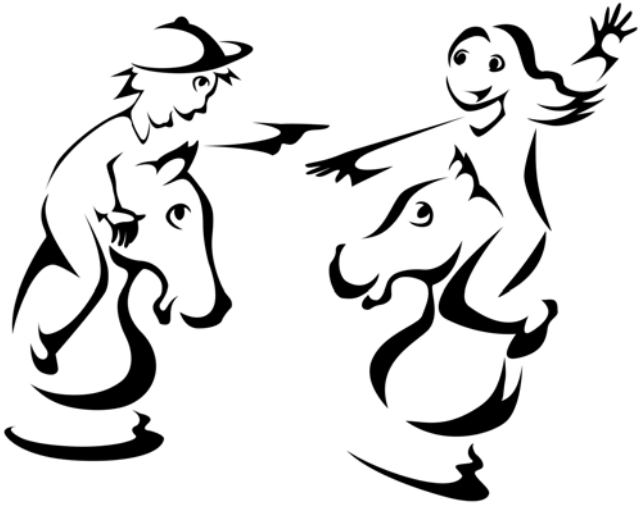
Why Chess Should Be a Part of Every Child's Education

Imagine a world where people all have excellent problem solving skills, where they are patient and respectful of each other on a daily basis. A society where citizens live for the future and plan long term, thinking of where their children's children will be, following through, seeing each goal to its conclusion with ease. Now add to that an indefinable quality of artistic imagination, dreaming for more than can be reasonably expected, reaching beyond the status quo.

Chess can teach our next generation all these skills and more!

I learned the game when I was young and to this day I see the world as a giant chess game where any barrier can be conquered and any victory can be achieved. No goal is impossible and when I have a target in sight there is no stopping me. The same glint I had in my eye when I faced an opponent at a chess tournament still exists today when I face a challenge, along with the insouciant grin that comes from the pure joy of the experience.

Intuitively most would agree that chess improves a student's grades and ability to study. Numerous studies have been done over the years throughout the world that show this to be the case. IQ increases, reading test results improve as do math and science scores. However there are so many other skills children pick up naturally from learning and becoming good at chess.



Imagination is a must in chess. You cannot form strategies and tactical plans without being able to envision your goals. It is impossible to win a game without first imagining the victory. You are the one to make the pieces dance to the rhythm you choose. Without the player the pieces just sit dormant on a dusty board.

A child's self confidence soars as the victories pile up, especially when that child can routinely trounce adults. Allow that child to teach other children or perhaps even the adults and he or she will master the game quickly. Nothing helps someone learn faster than teaching others and nothing does more for one's pride than to see someone improve under one's tutelage.

In order to achieve a victory one must consistently play well throughout the game. You can make forty excellent moves and one thoughtless blunder and lose the game instantly. As a result you quickly learn to be thorough in your analysis and patient with your moves. Imagine if we all applied this little lesson to our daily lives. Thoughtless comments, heat of the moment bursts of anger, crimes of passion might just become things of the past to be studied as a part of a history lesson.

If every parent initiated regular family chess nights and if every school taught chess as part of their daily lesson plan imagine where our country could be. Children naturally are drawn to chess. If you don't believe me try an easy experiment. Go to an area populated with children, put out a chess set and see what happens. I promise you they will flock to the board and become immersed in a game. We all have the power to fuel our children's existing passion for learning and help our next generation soar. Let's make a difference! MLT

Laura Sherman founded Your Chess Coach (www.YourChessCoach.com) with her husband, Dan Sherman. Together they teach children to play chess through various schools in Pinellas County, Florida, as well as privately in students' homes and online.

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By Kimberley Payne

Pain Killer – What to do with Achy and Sore muscles

Do you hear the songbirds calling you to come and play outside? Maybe you're thinking that you'd love to get into the garden but your knees and hips are feeling stiff. Not to mention your sore back. However, the more sedentary your lifestyle, the stiffer your joints will become. Regular activity will help you experience fewer aches and pains, better posture and balance, more energy, and an improved quality of life. Other benefits to starting an exercise program include meeting new people, feeling more relaxed, sleeping better, and having more fun. Here are a few helpful hints to get started:

Begin slowly.
Start with a fifteen-minute warm-up of slow walking to raise the temperature of your body and muscles. This will give you greater flexibility and lower the chance of straining a muscle.

Know your limits.
Don't push yourself too hard or compete with friends. Move at your own pace and frequently ask yourself, "How hard am I working?" A simple way to monitor your exercise intensity is to use the Talk Test. This is based on the understanding that you should always be able to hold a conversation while exercising. Exercise intensity should be adjusted so that two to three-word phrases are possible.

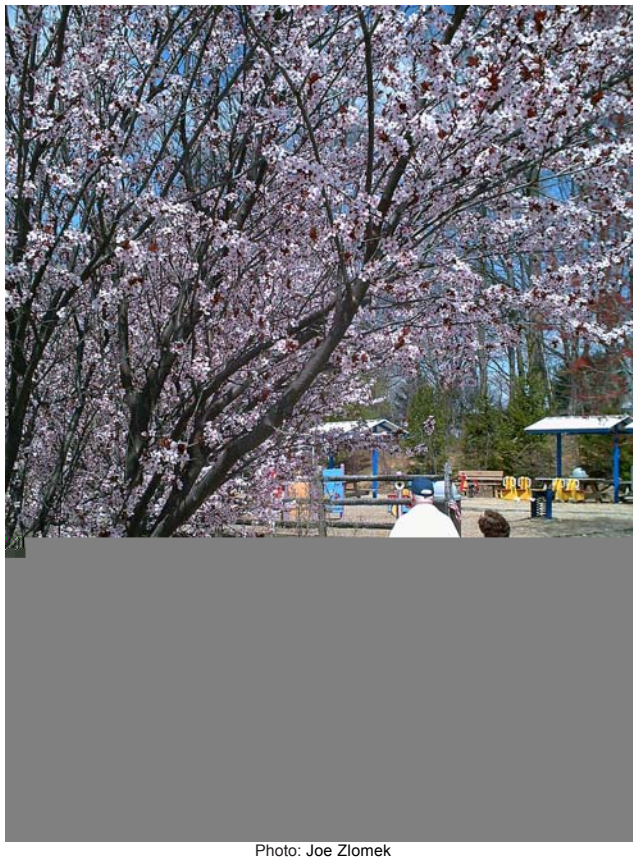

Photo: Joe Zlomek

Keep breathing.
When you exercise, don't hold your breath. Pay attention to signs of overexertion, such as pounding in your chest, dizziness or faintness, or profuse sweating. Cool down for five to 10 minutes before ending your workout. If any symptoms persist, see your doctor.

Continue to exercise.
If you are feeling a little sore, continue activity but choose something different. For example, if your legs are tired from your first curling lesson, make sure you go for a walk the next day to help limber up those muscles. The idea is to keep the muscle moving and active, but not to put any stress on it, which could further injure it and/or delay healing. Alternating activities is a wonderful way to keep muscles from getting achy.

Treat yourself.
After a day of exercise, sooth tired muscles in a hot bath with Epsom salts. It is normal to feel stiff and to have sore muscles following your first sessions of an activity program. This soreness will soon disappear with regular participation.

There are many activities to choose from. Consider walking, swimming, line dancing, cycling or bird watching. Round out endurance activities with flexibility activities such as stretching, gardening, golf, bowling or curling. If you are not sure where to start, try visiting your community centre, senior's centre or local recreation department. Talk with your doctor, family and friends to find out what they are doing to stay active.

Blessings on the road to health! MLT

Kimberley Payne, a former Personal Trainer who lives in Ontario, combines Christian commitment with ten years experience in the health and wellness arena. Visit her Website www.kimberleypayne.com her Blog www.fitforfaith.blogspot.com, and you can connect over Twitter: @fitforfaith.

By Mallie Majarais

White Tea:
What's it all about?

White tea is the subtlest of all the varieties of tea, using only the finest tealeaves from each bush with a minimal amount of processing. White tea is just beginning to make an impact on Western culture. This is because there are new studies emerging that show that white tea is 10% more effective in improving immune health than its green cousin.

Most of the white tea in the world comes from China and Japan, but there are also several regions of India that process white tea as well. The leaves are picked and harvested before the leaves open fully, when the buds are still covered by fine white hair. This is a sign of a good quality white tea. White tea is scarcer than the other traditional teas, and quite a bit more expensive.

Photo: Lekyu

White tea is similar to green tea, in that it's undergone very little processing and no fermentation. But there is a noticeable difference in taste. Most green teas have a distinctive 'grassy' taste to them, but white tea does not. The flavor is described as light, and sweet.

If you are drinking tea for your health, you may want to consider white teas. There is also considerably less caffeine in white tea than the other varieties (15mg per serving, compared to 40mg for black tea, and 20mg for green). Some studies have also shown that white tea contains more active cancer-fighting antioxidants than green tea.

White teas are best when prepared like green tea. Their delicate nature will be destroyed by water that is too hot. The ideal water temperature is about 180 degrees Fahrenheit. Add 1 to 1.5 tablespoons of white tea per eight ounces of water in a cup or teapot. Pour water over the tea and steep for two minutes.

One serving of white tea can be brewed several times, with each steep revealing another element of flavor. In the case of Silver Needle, the steeping can be as long as three to seven minutes, depending on the water temperature. Luckily, White tea tends to be a very resilient leaf, not easily turning bitter. In other words, it'll still taste good if you're a few minutes late.

At O-CHA tea bar we stock a Silver Needle and a White Peony…however, a true connoisseur is always welcome to look through our catalog to special order from hundreds of options. MLT

O·CHA
tea bar

Please visit us at 300 River St., Suite 122 Greenville, SC 29601
864-283-6702 We are located below the Hampton Inn and Lazy Goat restaurant on the River Walk, West End Greenville.
www.ochateabaronline.com
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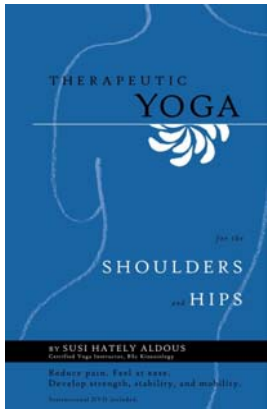
By Susi Hately Aldous

Back Pain and Yoga Therapy

Back pain affects about 80 percent of Americans at some point in their lives and is among the most common complaint received and treated by physicians. Most often, the exact cause of the pain is not addressed or properly diagnosed but masked with pain medication causing the problem to worsen with time.



The list seem endless as to why so many people suffer from problems with their backs including: being overweight, having bad posture, sitting for hours at a desk without taking breaks, exercising the wrong way, and repetitive movement. What most don't realize is that the root of the pain may lay in a completely different part of the body. "There are times when we feel pain in the immediate area of weakness, but that typically isn't the source of the problem," explains Susi Hately Aldous, yogi, trained kinesiologist and founder of Functional Synergy. "Back pain can stem from a number of places in your body such as if your shoulders are not properly aligned or your hips are too stiff. If people learned how to move properly many of their back issues would be alleviated."

Susi explains that yoga can help improve back pain in three ways:

1. Gentle stretches and strengthening techniques. Gentle stretches and strengthening techniques unwind myofascial tightness and imbalances.

2. Increase body awareness. By increasing one's awareness of how they sit, stand, walk and move generally, people can learn some of the causes behind their pain. Once aware of the cause, change can be made.

3. Improve breathing. Effective breathing requires fluid movement of the diaphragm. Without this fluid movement excessive tension builds. Effective breathing also induces a "relaxation response" in the parasympathetic nervous system. This response helps to further relieve muscle tension and pain.

The most common physical limitations in people with back pain are in their shoulders and hips. If the functioning of the shoulders and hips improves, the pain level becomes much more manageable or resolved. Improving function requires a balance of mobility, stability and strength. It isn't just about stretching.

"A combination of these three aspects is required to truly pull yourself out of pain," says Susi, whose customized therapeutic yoga programs blend the art of Hatha yoga asanas, breathing techniques and meditation with the modern scientific understanding of kinesiology, anatomy and physiology. It is a balanced and mindful approach to health and healing which enables one to develop awareness and a sense of ease. The goal is to treat the underlying pain and root of the problem and maintain proper levels of comfort, allowing clients to live life to the fullest wherever their starting point is. Her clients come from many different walks of life, from cancer survivors and people with chronic pain, lupus, fibromyalgia and migraines to professional athletes and fitness enthusiasts wanting to improve their performance.

Susi Hately Aldous is a renowned yoga teacher and author of several international best-selling yoga books. Her latest title, Advancing Your Yoga Practice: the Art of Slowing Down launched in September 2008 and follows her other titles including Therapeutic Yoga, Yoga for the Desk Jockey and, Anatomy and Asana: Preventing Yoga Injuries Series. Her yoga skills are enhanced by her B.Sc. in kinesiology, post-graduate training in mind-body medicine and ergonomics and, practical field experience assisting companies with disability management and workplace safety issues.

Susi's main focus and expertise is in helping people overcome pain and injuries with her customized yoga therapy programs. Since 2004, Susi teaches a comprehensive therapeutic certification program for aspiring instructors to learn the importance of well-being as it affects various conditions. This training program, based on the Hatha yoga method, encompasses her wide range of acquired disciplines including kinesiology, yoga iRest (yoga nidra), rehabilitation, modern mind-body science and practical experience as an exercise therapist and ergonomics consultant. Find more info at www.functionalsynergy.com.

By Chris McNeil

The Three Circles Strategy of Eating Management

There is an epidemic of obesity and a nation on roller coaster diets. People cycle between eating fattening foods and sticking to the discipline of a "diet" to lose the unwanted weight. So they either feel guilty for eating something they enjoy or deprived for eating something for health. That's frustrating. Fortunately, there is an alternate mindset to "sticking to your diet" that you can adopt if you choose.

Drop the Idea of "Good" and "Bad" Foods

The first thing to understand is that root of the problem is not a lack of discipline. It's the belief that "there are good foods and bad foods". If you think you might have that belief, I hope to help you consider an alternative way of thinking that may empower you to achieve a healthy weight and stay there if you choose to embrace it.

If it wasn't good for something, you wouldn't eat it!

In order to be successful at long-term weight loss, you need to drop our idea that there are good and bad foods and replace it with the belief that all foods you eat are good, but for different purposes. Abolishing the concept of "forbidden foods" means they lose their emotional charge. When you consciously have them you can no longer unconsciously have them. The trick is balancing and integrating your eating motivations.

Integrating Enjoyment, Health, and Convenience

Some foods are good for nutrition, such as plain rice cakes. Other foods are good for enjoyment like chocolate. Some are quick and easy, like grabbing pretzels in a convenience store on the road.

Imagine three circles, each containing foods that represent the positive motivation for eating them- easy, fun, or for health.

The two simple things you have to do are

1) Balance them properly
2) Build the area where the circles converge.

How many ways can you discover foods that are healthy, and enjoyable to eat? Sautéed shrimp and vegetable with pasta fits that category for me. What is quick and healthy? Yogurt with rolled oat and fresh berries takes me 5 minutes to make in the morning and tastes great, too. I don't know what foods help you to build out the area where the 3 circles converge, but I do know that putting your attention there is to your benefit.

Make eating as fun as possible! Let go of your judgment about foods you may have felt bad about in the past. Drop guilt, it's useless. Enjoy it all, and gain control of the balance of your eating motivations so you can have the body you want and enjoy eating to the utmost. If you are strictly dieting, know that "passing the baton" to a balanced eating management plan that takes long-term balance into account, will be necessary to maintain your weight loss. If you wish to create a better body with more energy and well-being, using this plan of balance with the synergy of a good exercise program will work wonders in the short and long run. MLT

Chris McNeil's Pensarc Software was recognized as an "Innovator 2008" by the Charleston Regional Business Journal for developing www.fitmenu.net . Chris has also won two national awards for innovation for web-based fitness software. Follow fitmenu on twitter at www.twitter.com/fitmenu You can reach Chris at chris@pensarc.com.

By Dr. David H. Mruz DC

Allergies - Welcome to Spring

Springtime means the start of little league games, gardening, long walks with your dog, and for at least one in five Americans, itchy watery eyes, sneezes, runny noses, swelling, nasal congestion and a slew of other allergy related symptoms. But before you start pointing fingers at pollen, grass, weeds and molds for bringing on these maladies, take a look at your immune system.

The pollen, dust and mold are actually just harmless substances in our environment which some immune systems inappropriately target as dangerous invaders. To protect the body, white blood cells called mast cells and basophils are activated to fight off the invaders leading to an extreme inflammatory response and the release of a chemical called histamine into the blood stream. This immune system malfunction causes your common allergy symptoms like watery eyes, swelling and mucus production.

Amazingly, most people simply suffer through these symptoms year after year or mask the problem with over the counter medications or allergy shots but we need to realize that this problem is not going away. In fact, it is getting worse. An estimated 50 million Americans suffer from allergies and this number has been climbing for the past two decades among all races and ages. It's currently the 5th leading chronic disease in the U.S. for adults and 3rd for children with 10,000 kids missing school due to allergies on any given day for an annual total of 2 million lost school days.

Why is this disease on the rise, especially among children? Interestingly it doesn't appear to be hereditary as many people assume. While genetic factors can be linked to susceptibility, the massive allergy diagnosis increases occurring in such a short time span more readily suggest environmental or lifestyle changes. Thus, allergies may be linked to a more germ-a-phobic society and the increased usage of antibiotics or other immune system related drugs.

Studies show that individuals who live in too sterile environment are not exposed to enough pathogens and endotoxins, thus normally benign microbial objects like pollen will trigger an immune response. Researchers found that children who grow up with siblings, who enter daycare at an early age or who live on farms were less likely to develop allergies because they were exposed to a multitude of pathogens and endotoxins leading to a stronger immune system.

Evidence suggests that priming of the immune responses against allergens starts happening in utero and is thus affected by the mother's environment. In addition, early life exposure to normal microbial flora primes the immune system for a non-allergic phenotype.

The use of anti-bacterial cleaning products may also be linked to autoimmune dysfunction. An article published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Management found that the weekly use of household cleaning sprays put participants at an increased risk of asthma related symptoms with an even higher incidence among people using the sprays four times weekly.

Epidemiological data also supports the "hygiene hypothesis". Studies have shown that various immunological and autoimmune diseases are much less common in the developing world than the industrialized world and studies in third world countries demonstrate an increase in immunological disorders, like allergies, as a country grows more affluent and presumably cleaner.

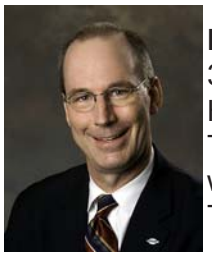
Today's society relies heavily on medications which have also been shown to cause autoimmune problems. The use of antibiotics in the first year of life has been linked to asthma and other allergic diseases. Scientists at the University of Michigan Medical School found that antibiotics may be responsible for producing changes in microbes in the GI tract, which in turn impacts the way the immune system responds to airborne allergens.

Sadly our response to increased allergy symptoms frequently includes upping our medication intake. The main problem with this approach is that antihistamines simply chase the symptoms without getting to the root of the problem. Allergy shots are somewhat effective against airborne allergens however the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology does not recommend this treatment when it comes to other types of allergy triggers - such as food allergies and skin reactions. These shots also require extensive skin tests followed by years of bi-weekly or monthly shots.

Instead of suffering with each season change, consider getting a work-up to isolate and correct any imbalances/deficiencies which can increase your immune system's likelihood of misfiring. It is essential to get a complete work-up because simply testing your white blood cell counts will miss the problem. You already have the allergy symptoms, which suggests higher white blood count levels but what about your protein levels? That's right; protein plays a part in allergies.

The immune system utilizes protein-based substances to defend the body against germs, allergens and invaders. If you are protein deficient, the body will not have the resources to create roadblocks against diseases.

Without knowing what parts of the body are not working, how can you expect to correct the problem? MLT



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