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**a**re you looking for something different in your workouts—exercise that will engage your body and mind in a new way? Mind-body exercise (physical activity performed with an internal focus) is an increasingly popular choice. It can improve not only flexibility, strength, posture and balance but also coordination, stress management and focus.

### Which Road to Take?

How do you decide which type of mind-body exercise will best match your interests and goals? Mara Carrico, author of *Yoga Journal's Yoga Basics: The Essential Beginner's Guide to Yoga for a Lifetime of Health and Fitness*, suggests you consider three key questions:

1. What are my primary goals (e.g., stress reduction, better posture, greater flexibility, vigorous exercise, a more philosophical approach to exercise, etc.)?
2. Do I need to consider any physical limitations?
3. What time commitment am I willing to make?

### Many Paths to Travel

Carrico offers this brief overview of five of the most popular types of mind-body exercise:

**Yoga.** Yoga involves directing your attention and breath as you assume a series of poses, or stretches. Yoga can be very vigorous ("power yoga") or very gentle; the type you choose should depend on your goals. This form of exercise is extremely effective for improving flexibility, stress management, relaxation skills, focus, and awareness of the breath. Yoga has developed within a rich Eastern tradition and is often, though not always, taught with some philosophical component. Classes are available in yoga centers and in many gyms and studios.

**Qi Gong and Tai Chi.** The term "qi gong" (or "chi kung") describes the complete tradition of spiritual, martial and health exercises developed in China. Tai chi is one of the most common of these. Practicing qi gong involves performing a series of movements while paying attention to the body and staying aware of the breath. The exercises are especially effective for developing balance, focus, coordination and graceful, *centered* movement. They range from very simple and uncomplicated to extremely detailed and demanding. Doing qi gong can be an excellent way to ease gently into movement, particularly if you sit all day at your job or have been inactive for a while. Qualified teachers, videotapes and books can introduce you to these ancient techniques.

## How to Choose a Mind-Body Exercise

**Exercise Inspired by Joseph Pilates.** This technique, favored by many dancers, includes both floor-work and equipment-based exercises. It conditions the whole body but is particularly effective for developing the torso and abdominal musculature. The exercises emphasize breathing, form and posture with the purpose of increasing flexibility, strength and mobility. The system does not include a philosophical component. You will find this type of exercise under various names, including Pilates®, The Method and Balanced Body. For more information call (800) 474-5283, (800) 745-2837 or (800) 505-1990.

**The Feldenkrais Method.** Feldenkrais exercises emphasize self-observance and reeducation of thought, posture and movement patterns. If you have physical limitations (such as neuromuscular, postural or skeletal problems) or simply want to retrain your body to move more naturally and effectively, this therapeutic method can be very useful. For more information call (800) 775-2118 or (800) 765-1907.

**The Alexander Technique.** If one of your primary goals is to improve your posture or the way you sit, stand or walk, the Alexander Technique may be your choice. This method does not consist of a series of exercises; instead, you learn to observe your own movements, release the tension and pain caused by poor habits and discover more efficient ways to move. For more information call (800) 473-0620 or (212) 799-0468.

### Finding Your Own Way

While these short descriptions can give you some pointers, there is no clear-cut solution to finding the *right* mind-body exercise for you. In fact, you may find that different exercises work better for you at different times in your life. Look for qualified instructors and trust your own instincts. Exploring various exercises, instructors, classes and facilities is just part of your journey to better health and greater self-awareness. ♦

*This handout is a service of IDEA, the leading international membership organization in the health and fitness industry.*

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