

BREAK A SWEAT WITH MINDFUL MOVEMENT

by the Merrithew Health & Fitness™ Team



The mind-body exercise spectrum grows to include high-intensity workouts

For those who are already dedicated to enjoying an active lifestyle, the New Year signifies more than simply making a resolution to go to the gym. Rather, it's a time to recommit and determine how our bodies can become even greater vehicles than they already are—faster, stronger and ultimately better in the safest, most effective and responsible way possible. This may mean a new style of workout, a new approach or a newly-opened mind to other training methods. Intense exercisers and 'hardcore' athletes may eschew mind-body modalities as something reserved for the gentler, 'zen' set of the population, but with even elite athletes including NHL and NFL players participating in mind-body exercise, this is a style of workout that anyone can benefit from.

What Exactly Is Mind-Body Exercise?

Typically, when one thinks of mindful movement, gentler forms of exercise like pilates and yoga tend to come to mind. While these exercise styles certainly embody mindful modalities, the range of

mind-body exercises continues to broaden and include workouts that get the heart rate up while employing focus that requires more conscientiousness than simply completing a high level of reps within a limited time frame.

Tens of millions of North Americans participate in mindful movement modalities to achieve the benefits that this form of fitness has to offer, including:

- Reduced stress
- Increased energy and stamina
- Better sleep
- Enhanced concentration
- Overall improved quality of life

While there is no single or universal definition for mind-body exercise, the term generally encompasses a modality that requires focus on the synchronization of breath and movement with special attention paid to proper form and alignment. Inner mental focus, keen concentration and awareness of every muscular movement, big or small, are also key features of mind-body exercise.

Mindfulness Present in Popular and Performance-Focused Workouts

As the scope of mind-body exercise continues to broaden and become more inclusive, popular workouts are adding elements of mindfulness in an effort to provide effective, result-oriented, heart-rate boosting sweat sessions that yield fewer injuries and greater introspection.

Barre workouts are one of the hottest trends in fitness right now, but many people wouldn't likely categorize them in the same box as mind-body exercise. Most barre programs currently on the market tend to focus on 'feeling the burn'. A dance-inspired workout, such as Total Barre™, still delivers effective results while reducing the likelihood of injury by adding an element of mindfulness and connecting breath with movement.

For athletes looking to level up their performance on the playing field, interval workouts continue to be a popular and effective choice. To further 'up the ante', consider pairing kinesthetic awareness and core strength to improve total body power through programs such as CORE™ Athletic Conditioning & Performance Training™. In the past, a multi-layered exercise system that combines body control and power movements would not have fallen into the mind-body category, but with an acute focus on retraining unbalanced muscles which undoubtedly requires strong mental presence and focus, programs that focus on functional fitness absolutely fall within the mind-body exercise continuum.

Unique tools like the Halo® Trainer, an infinity shaped tool that can be used independently or with a stability ball to regress and progress basic fitness moves, fit perfectly within the redefined mindful movement spectrum. This stability-challenging piece of equipment that requires absolute focus to maintain balance caters to every type of client, from rehabilitation patients to moderate exercisers to even top athletes proving that mindful movement can truly benefit *anyone* that enjoys an active lifestyle.

How to Make Your Next Workout More Mindful

No matter what your workout of choice there's always an opportunity to delve deeper and make a conscious effort to get more out of it. To employ mindfulness in your next workout, here are some helpful tips:

- **Practice breath awareness.** Breathing regulates all of the body's system and is a stress reducer for the nervous system. Breathing patterns have the potential to increase metabolic rate and create more inner awareness both physically and mentally.

- **Focus on the quality of movement.** It's easy enough to perform any exercise, but the challenge is to consciously consider how every minute detail of the movement has an impact on the body. Perform all movements with awareness and purpose and you'll create a closer connection to your whole self.

- **Be mindful toward food.** The old adage goes 'you can't out-exercise a bad diet' and what you eat will truly impact your fitness performance. A diet full of whole, clean and unprocessed foods will result in an efficient, alkalized body that can better perform physical feats.

By taking a more mindful approach to exercise and to life in general, you can look forward to reaping the results of greater happiness, better health and the wonderful ability to live life in the present moment. Whether it's a gentler form of exercise for active aging clients or high-intensity training that caters to performance-based athletes, there are many options now available to the fitness community at large. Explore available mind-body modalities for a change of pace that aligns with you or your clients' personal fitness goals.

Merrithew Health & Fitness™ (MH&F) is a leader in mindful movement with high-end programming including STOTT PILATES®, ZEN•GA™, CORE™ Athletic Conditioning & Performance Training™, Total Barre™ and Halo® Training. Backed by 25 years of experience and the latest findings in exercise science, MH&F's philosophy is to deliver safe, responsible and effective exercise for people of all ages and levels of fitness.



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