BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Sitting Is the New Smoking. But Are We Moving Towards Health?

Beyond exercise: rediscovering vitality, resilience and the intelligence of the body.

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We have all heard the phrase “Sitting is the new smoking.” While it is an oversimplification, it highlights an important truth: our increasingly sedentary lifestyles affect our health.

And yes, we need to move! Walk. Run. Swim. Dance. Hike in the mountains. Walk along the beach. Do whatever makes you feel alive and joyful.

But what if movement could offer us something more than physical fitness? What if we learned to move with greater intelligence, awareness and respect for the natural design of our bodies?

In honour of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I want to explore how movement can support not only disease prevention, but also our capacity to navigate illness, everyday stress and life’s challenges with greater vitality.

Moving with the body’s design

Our bodies are designed for movement, variety and adaptation, yet we spend much of our lives sitting, often unaware of how we hold ourselves.

Notice how you are sitting right now. Where is your pelvis in relation to your chest and head? Are you gripping your hip flexors, collapsing through your spine or holding unnecessary tension?

Our posture, breathing and muscular tension influence how we experience our bodies. Prolonged sitting can contribute to stiffness and discomfort, particularly around the hips and lower back.

In Nia, we explore the body’s natural design, learning to move with greater efficiency, mobility, stability and dynamic ease. It is not about maintaining a perfect posture. It is about developing awareness and allowing movement to restore variety where we have become habitual or restricted.

From reacting to responding

Stress is part of life. But how we respond to it matters. Many of us spend our days pushing through fatigue, overriding discomfort and carrying tension without even noticing it.

Through conscious movement and sensation, we can begin recognising our habitual responses and creating opportunities to choose differently. A healthy nervous system is not one that is always calm. It is

one that can mobilise when needed and recover when the challenge has passed.

> *Resilience is not about remaining in control. It is about developing the capacity to adapt.*

Emotional expression: moving beyond contraction

Our emotions are not separate from our bodies. Think about how you move when you are joyful, anxious, angry or sad. Our posture, breathing, gestures and energy often reflect our emotional state.

Nia offers opportunities to explore emotions through music, movement, breath and imagination. A small gesture, a sigh, a sway or a moment of playful movement can help us reconnect with what we are feeling.

The invitation is not to force happiness or deny difficult emotions, but to allow a fuller range of human expression. As we become more aware of our emotional patterns, we can become more conscious of how we meet the world and affect those around us.

> *Sometimes choosing a little joy is enough to shift our experience of the moment.*

Neuroplasticity: keeping the mind curious

Our brains, like our bodies, thrive on variety. Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to adapt and reorganise through learning and experience, a capacity we retain throughout life.

In Nia, we combine structured choreography with freedom of movement, challenging coordination, balance, rhythm, memory and attention. We change direction, explore unfamiliar movements and engage imagination and curiosity.

Enjoyable challenges and a sense of progress can engage dopamine-related systems involved in motivation and reward. What if exercise became something we looked forward to, rather than another obligation?

Salutogenesis: creating health, not just treating disease

Much of healthcare understandably focuses on identifying and treating illness. But what if we also asked a different question: What creates health?

This is the essence of salutogenesis, a concept developed by medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky. Rather than focusing exclusively on disease, it explores the resources and experiences that support our ability to move towards health.

Movement, meaningful relationships, rest, nourishment, curiosity and joy all have a place in supporting well-being. This does not mean replacing necessary medication or treatment. It means recognising that health is also shaped by how we live every day.

Moving with and through cancer

During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, it is important to recognise that regular physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of breast cancer and several other chronic diseases.

Appropriately adapted exercise can also support physical functioning, fatigue management, emotional well-being and quality of life during and after cancer treatment. But a diagnosis can affect confidence, identity and our relationship with our bodies.

Nia offers a compassionate invitation to begin with the body we have today. Movement can be gentle, seated, expressive or energising, depending on individual needs and abilities. There is no performance to achieve: only an opportunity to reconnect with sensation, choice, pleasure and aliveness.

Nia is not a cancer treatment or cure. Movement during treatment or recovery should be adapted with guidance from the healthcare team.

Through movement, find health

I am certainly not suggesting you give up your favourite sport, morning run, swim or gym session. Keep doing what you love! But consider what else your body, mind and emotions need.

Interrupt long periods of sitting. Notice your posture. Move to your favourite song. Learn something new. Take a walk with a friend.

And ask yourself: When last did I do something that made me feel truly alive?

We cannot prevent every illness or control everything life brings us. But we can actively nurture the conditions that support our health, resilience and vitality.

> *It is not only about adding more years to our lives. It is about bringing more life to our years.*

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Educational article. Nia complements but does not replace medical assessment, cancer screening or treatment.