

peaceful movement 24

for you to know

Certain types of physical movement can help people relieve anxiety and feel more peaceful. When you practice these movements on a regular basis, you can keep anxiety at a lower level.

Here are three common types of peaceful movement.

1. Relaxed Stretching

Stretching is simply the gentle, sustained movement of elongating your muscles. When you stretch your muscles, you help to dissipate the stress chemicals that have collected in them and you increase the blood circulation in your body, both of which help relieve anxiety. If you breathe peacefully and deeply while you stretch, you help bring oxygen to all of your muscle groups, also relieving anxiety.

Stretching is one of the easiest anxiety-reducing techniques you can use because you can stretch almost any muscle group at any time, almost anywhere you are. You don't need special equipment or a large block of time. You don't need any particular athletic skill or ability.

It is important to stretch slowly and gently so that you don't overextend your muscles. If you stretch a little every day on a regular basis, you will help keep your anxiety level low. If you take a stretching break when you are feeling particularly tense about something, it will help you release and manage feelings of anxiety. Stretching all of your muscles will help keep them relaxed and flexible. Stretching the particular muscles where you hold most of your tension will help to bring relief in that particular area.

2. Yoga

Yoga is a science of life that originated in India thousands of years ago. Its philosophy strives to unify body, mind, and spirit through exercise, breathing, and meditation in order to maintain balance and health in life.

The physical exercises, or postures, learned in yoga are designed to increase the health of the glandular system in your body. The stretching involved tones your muscles and joints as well as your entire skeletal system. Breathing exercises help to increase and maintain your health through breath control, bringing energy to your body and developing peacefulness. Meditation develops a quiet mind and releases anxiety as well as increasing your mental power and concentration.

The goal of yoga is to develop a state of inner peace. Practice does not involve any special equipment or clothing, but some beginning instruction is necessary to learn the postures and the correct positioning of your body.

3. T'ai Chi

T'ai Chi is a practice of movement stemming from Chinese culture. While historically it was considered a martial art and a form of nonviolent self-defense, it is widely practiced in Western cultures today as a form of "moving meditation." Movements in T'ai Chi are performed softly and gracefully with smooth, even transitions between them.

Along with stimulating the flow of "chi," or energy, throughout the body and increasing health and vitality, T'ai Chi movements foster a calm and tranquil mind, help you to relax and relieve tension, and reverse the effects of stress on your body and mind. The slow, meditative movements of T'ai Chi make it a helpful practice for relaxation, balance, and physical and emotional health.

As with yoga, T'ai Chi requires instruction to help you begin, but once you have learned a number of movements, you can continue to practice alone, for either prevention or management of anxiety.

Even just a few minutes of peaceful movement when you wake up in the morning can set a peaceful tone for your whole day. The same activity at midday can help you recenter yourself and come back to a place of balance. Done right before you go to sleep at night, peaceful movement can help you sleep more deeply and restfully.

directions

You can learn how to do relaxed stretching, yoga, and T'ai Chi by taking classes through your school, park district, fitness center, or other educational facility. You can also try out any of these activities first by asking if you can visit a class or by watching tapes or DVDs that you can buy, rent from a video store, or borrow from your library. Trying out these activities first can give you an idea of which one you feel most comfortable with and which one suits you the best.

Find a way to try each of these types of movement at least once. Each time you try a new technique, pay attention to your anxiety level before and after your practice. Rate your anxiety level by giving it a number on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 being completely peaceful and 10 being highly anxious). Record your ratings here.

Relaxed Stretching

Anxiety level before one session of relaxed stretching:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Anxiety level after one session of relaxed stretching:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Yoga

Anxiety level before one session of yoga:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Anxiety level after one session of yoga:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

T'ai Chi

Anxiety level before one session of T'ai Chi:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Anxiety level after one session of T'ai Chi:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

more to do

Tell which of the movement activities you liked best, and why.

Tell which of the movement activities you liked least, and why.

Rate the three movement activities in the order of their effectiveness for lowering your anxiety level, with 1 being the most and 3 being the least effective.

___ Relaxed Stretching ___ Yoga ___ T'ai Chi

Tell how easy or difficult it was for you to do a slow-moving activity, and why.

Sometimes people actually get a little more anxious when they first try a peaceful movement activity. They may be nervous about doing it "right" or they may not be used to having their bodies moving so quietly or slowly. If that happened to you, describe your experience.

If any of these movement activities were enjoyable or helpful in lowering your anxiety level, try to practice them for five minutes a day or more, on a regular basis. That will help you release anxiety and stay more peaceful throughout the whole day. Write down a time of day that you could spend five minutes practicing peaceful movement.

It can take some people a number of tries before they become comfortable with a peaceful movement activity. Try not to give up until you have really given it a chance.