

Nia Dancing

FITNESS FOR THE BODY & SOUL

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Photo: Jeff Stewart Photography

When looking for a suitable workout, people usually want to find something that makes them feel fit, healthy and happy. While there are many different fitness routines offering to help us achieve the body of our dreams, most of them focus mainly on the body and ignore the mind. In contrast, Nia dancing is a training form where not only the body gets a good workout, but the mind as well.

When you arrive at the OurNiaSpace studio for a Nia dance session, you'd be forgiven for thinking that it is probably an old routine with a new name. With candles, incense and flowers positioned around the room, it looks more like a meditation or yoga studio than a dance

class. Once you get started, however, it becomes clear that Nia is a fusion of different dance arts, martial arts and healing arts, or, as Nia South Africa founder, Kathy Wolstenholme, described it, 'Nia is all about being joyful and having fun than anything else. How you look is less important, it's more important how you feel.'

The technique

Nia was first developed in the 1980s in America when aerobics dominated the fitness scene. At the time, people experienced a lot of injuries to the knees and hips because of the constant jumping movements. Two American trainers decided to create something

more pleasurable and with less injuries and came up with the Nia technique.

'Nia does not agree with the "no pain, no gain" saying, but is instead inspired by the desire to increase joy and decrease injuries,' explains Kathy. The dance is made up of 52 different movements with an emphasis on shifting your weight from side to side, as opposed to the constant up and down jumping movements in aerobics. 'This is better for the immune defence mechanism and the whole body,' says Kathy. 'Nia's aim is to address the whole person – body as well as mind.' Nia was first introduced to South Africa in 2002 when Kathy brought the dance technique to Cape Town. It has since

become so popular that there are 2,200 licenced teachers in more than 43 countries.

The experience

One of the main parts of Nia dancing is the ability to let your body and mind explore your state of mind and feelings. Throughout the Nia class, the teacher is less important as Nia dancing is self-guided by the sensation of pleasure as the body, mind and emotions are taken to a whole new level.

To begin, dancers are guided into a starting position for each exercise accompanied by some good music, but after that it is up to you to complete the

exercises according to how you feel. For example, as a teacher, Kathy might give you some exercises for your legs, but how you move your arms in that exercise is up to you, your state of mind, and how you feel like expressing yourself. There is no doubt about Nia being a very joyful and mentally giving experience, but it's not only about enjoying yourself, the workout has health benefits as well.

You, me & Nia

One of the great things about Nia is that it is suitable for all ages. While there are 52 movements in total, there are three different levels for each movement. Let's take a squat for example, the lower you bend in a squat, the more difficult

the exercise gets, and thereby squats have different levels which means that everyone can participate, regardless of their fitness level.

Nia dancing is an uplifting experience for both the body and mind and is a great alternative if you're not a fan of the gym. It will get your heart pumping and along with the various health benefits, it also burns fat and will help you get fit. There's a lot more to Nia than can fit into one article, but if you are looking for a gentler exercise that will help you reach your fitness goals, Nia is definitely worth a try. ☺

◀ Nia is a fusion of dance arts, martial arts and healing arts. It is all about experiencing your body through feeling and movement, whilst getting fit at the same time.



Photo: Justyna Furmanczyk freemages.com

▲ As well as being fun, Nia is about cardiovascular fitness as well as experiencing the spiritual healing art of dance movement.