

Somatic Movement & Fitness – working with the sensory-motor system to establish strong foundations

Soma is a living process by which our bodily sensations, movements, perceptions, emotions and thoughts form a whole of experience. Somatic study is an inquiry into our “lived body” by observing and exploring ourselves through sensing and moving. This occurs through the function of the sensory-motor feedback loop.

Somatic movement and practises :

- emphasize **internal** physical perception and experience
- re-educate the neuromuscular system toward greater health and well-being
- a holistic approach that connects body sciences, psychology and movement
- improve understanding of body & mind and support greater integration
- referred to as bodywork or movement repatterning, representing a variety of body/mind approaches. ([Thomas Hanna](#), [Susan Bauer](#), [Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen](#))

Establishing Strong Foundations – why use somatic movement in older adult fitness ?

- teaches us to listen to our bodies and to cultivate body awareness (re-awakens sensory-motor function)
- helps us become aware of our patterns (slouching) and how to consciously re-pattern them (stand straight) - sensing and moving muscles is a feed-back loop, going from muscle to spinal cord & brain and back again
- activates our innate body/mind intelligence for healing and life balance (cultivates our internal ability for self control)
- empowers self-care through self-inquiry & learning
- train us to be responsible for our health and well being

Somatic Movement + Fitness

1. Bridge the gap between Fitness and Wellness
 - Global approach; incorporates 4 of the 7 dimensions of wellness (physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual)
 - Connects body and mind
 - Improves alignment, technique and functional ability
2. Encourages self responsibility
 - improves health, vitality and meaning
 - supports healthcare system
3. Embodied exercise:
 - the art of connecting mind, body & feelings through movement and awareness of sensation.
 - to “embody” is to live more fully in one's body with awareness, understanding and compassion.
 - practicing fitness from this holistic perspective

Bridging the gap between Fitness and Wellness

Fitness involves activity of some sort that stimulates various systems of the body and maintains a certain condition within the body. Health, on the other hand, involves every system of the body, and is only achieved through a life style that supports health by incorporating other aspects of wellness into a more comprehensive plan that revolves around the combination of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.

FITNESS versus HEALTH

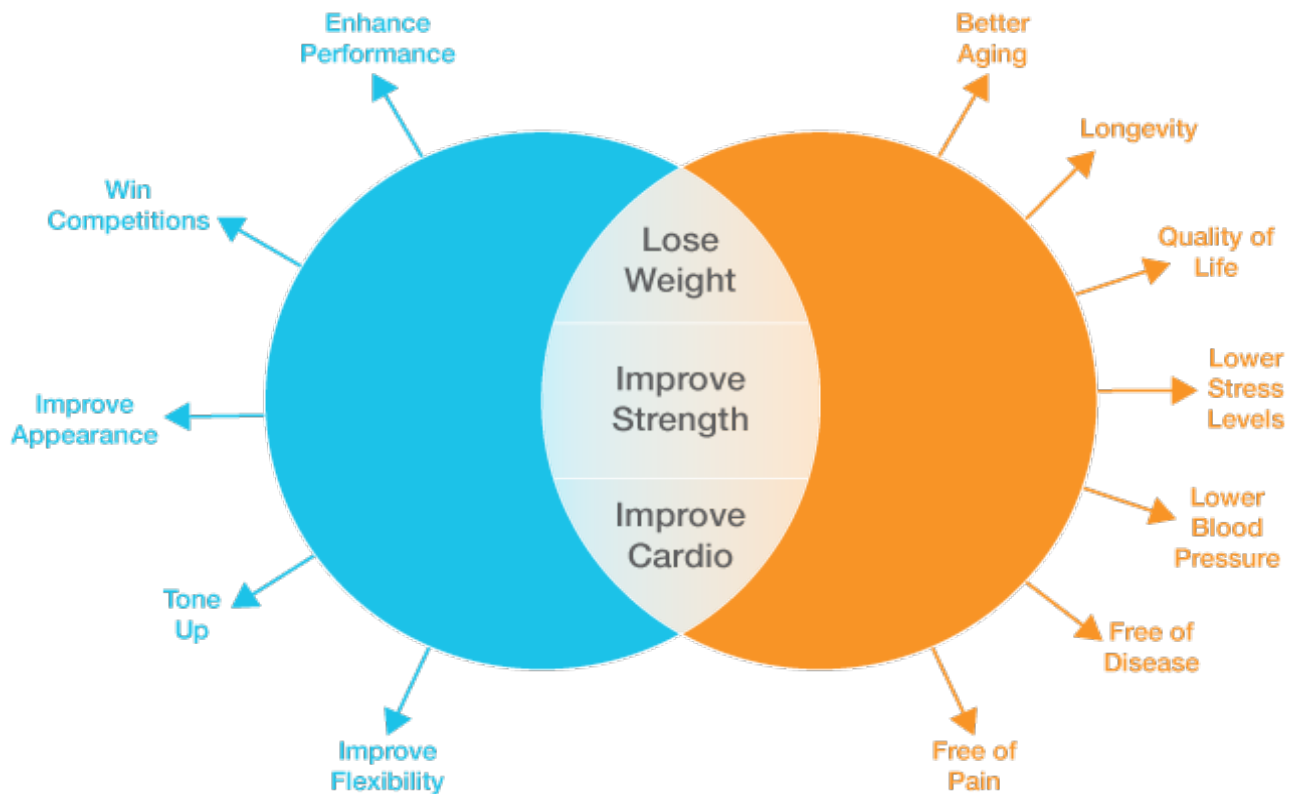


Image: Optimal Health Solutions

Embodied Exercise:

1. **Grounding** - allowing gravity to act on our weight
 - point of departure for all actions
 - helps us to connect with the ground and improve overall stability
 - requires relaxation of tensions stemming from both body and mind (yielding)
 - develops trust and confidence in self and in other
2. **The Push** – establishes primary gravitational support, strength and personal kinesphere
 - activates inner support and core integration
 - puts us in relationship with ourselves and our environment
3. **Thoracic Spine and Scapular Mobility** – key to improving upper back posture, core support and technique
 - major area of difficulty (pain, limited ROM, rigid, poor posture)
 - articulate thoracic spine & 5 scapular movements to release tension and re-pattern neuromuscular pathways
4. **Alignment of the Head** – improve posture and relieve pain
 - awareness of the bony structures (cervical spine, skull, shoulder girdle)
 - head placement (throat to back of neck, gently pull chin in), gentle stretching and strengthening

Exercises

1. **Grounding:** rolling foot on the tennis ball, rooting into the earth, dorsiflexion, weight transfer, staggered squat + somatic sensing
2. **The Push:** push experience – hand to hand, hand to leg, hand to wall or chair, feet to wall or chair, feet to floor (standing, sitting or lying on floor), hand to floor (mat) or chair – weight transfer + somatic sensing
3. **Thoracic Spine and Scapular Mobility:** lifting back of head, partner work (hand on scapula, partner supports weight of the arms) passive lift of elbow, shoulder circles hands on shoulder, scoop sitting on chair (slides hands on thighs, extend forward & up leading with fingers), unilateral spatial orientation + scoop, corner wall push-up
4. **Alignment of the Head:** throat to back of neck, extend arm overhead (against the wall), tuck chin in, neck stretches