

Learning to Stress Well.¹

It's Your Move. What's Moving You?

By Mary Elaine Kiener

I recently overheard a conversation in which a triathlete was asked: "If you could eat anything you wanted to anyway, would you still exercise?" The response? "OK, first, I don't exercise. I like doing stuff that happens to BE exercise."

I wish I could wholeheartedly share that philosophy—especially as I wistfully remember a time in my late 20's (as a financially struggling graduate student without a car), when I *could* eat whatever I wanted because I rode my bike everywhere, often averaging 15-20 miles/day. (The fact that I was concurrently ruining my otherwise finally-trim body with awful food choices is a story for another time!)

Intellectually, I certainly understand that exercise is important for maintaining a healthy body. If I were to simply move my body enough and ate a healthy-enough diet, I could happily eat anything I wished. Yet, as a lifelong bookworm turned desk-aholic, I continually struggle to identify forms of exercise that both I and my body can enjoy without boredom and/or discomfort. I abhor most types of exercise equipment, while my body is no longer able to tolerate extended bicycling or walking adventures.

I remember taking up swimming at one point in early middle-age. I adored the water's tranquility when alone in the pool. However, I quickly panicked whenever I attempted to swim laps in a crowded pool by forgetting (how) to breathe in the choppy water. It didn't take long for me to recognize the counter-productivity of using panic as a means of increasing my heart rate!

As my body continues to age, now I am also bombarded by media pronouncements such as "vigorous exercise is best for a long, healthy life" dueling with dire warnings about "7 exercises to never do after 50", alongside feature articles of ultra-fit seniors achieving new heights of physical prowess. Whatever is a body to do?

Within my own process of learning to stress well, the journey began with exploring and transforming the static concept of "exercise" into a more fluid dimension of "moving". Life-giving energy is alive and moving within us—including our beating heart, flowing blood, rolling eyes or rumbling stomach. Moving implies aliveness and an ability to change, while un-moving signifies stagnation and blockage of change. Moving—as a continuum from being to doing--embraces stillness, meditative practices and yoga postures as easily as ultra-marathon endeavors.

Being alive means that I'm always somehow moving, on my way to somewhere. It helps to remember to go with the flow, listening to what my body truly needs to find its best way forward, while honoring its own time and inner wisdom. The key is creating well-being in the here and now—which we'll discuss next time as we explore "feeling."

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¹ Kiener, M.E. (2015, May). Learning to stress well. It's your move. What's moving you? *Sibyl Magazine. For the Spirit and Soul of Woman*. Retrieved from www.sibylmagazine.com.