



Mind & Body Exercise - What is this?

While there is plenty of research to indicate that getting your heart rate up and working with heavier weights and intensities is beneficial, there is equal understanding on the other side that indicates the inclusion of more gentle, mindful exercise practices can also have a positive effect on health and exercise levels.

Mind & Body (also referred to as MindBody) practices have been around for a long time. In the last couple of decades exercise options in this area have increased, with a big surge in not just mainstream exercise facilities, but also in smaller studios offering specialist Mind & Body exercise options.

For some the option of intensive exercise is not appropriate (e.g in the case of injury, ability or life stage), so in these cases a mind/body exercise style can be idea and essential to staying active. Also those who do enjoy more intensive exercise are also finding the addition of a more focused Mind & Body exercise style included amongst the higher intensity adds to their exercise enjoyment, and their results.

So what exactly is Mind & Body exercise? Interestingly enough it's not 'exactly' anything, and that's the point. Mind & Body refers to a state where interactions and connections are made between your mind, your body and the world. Generally speaking, a Mind & Body exercise form is one in which the pace is slow enough for this connection to be focused on. That's not to say there isn't a sense of being connected on a run or during a weights session, but that this is not the main focus of the activity. Mind & Body exercise will often refer to a yoga, tai chi or Pilates class, a focused one on one session with a specialised trainer, or something you do by yourself, like a meditation session.

Mind & Body is a great way to bring back some of the balance into people's lives, especially if they are busy, stressed, or struggling to fit exercise in.

REPs Registered Exercise Professional Stephanie Melbourne who runs En Forme, a Barre and Pilates studio works with beginners like these all the time and says *"people who are getting back in to exercise after a period of time, or have never exercised in the past, will generally find Mind & Body an easier way to introduce regular exercise into their lives due to the slower pace, and lower intensity level than other forms of exercise"*.

So what are the benefits of Mind & Body Exercise?

The main physical benefits of these types of session relate to the stretching component, bringing benefits such as reduced muscle tension, improved range of movement in the joints, better muscular coordination and increased circulation of the blood to the body.

The mental benefits can include a variety of calming and empowering benefits. Mind & Body exercises have been proven to help people decrease anxiety and physical pain, improve sleep, and increase the sense of well-being.

REPs Registered Exercise Professional Jo Woollacott from WHY Retreat and Whangarei Heads Yoga sees a range of people in her business looking for help with injuries, chronic postural issues or illness such as chronic fatigue, and who are unable to do the more intense exercise programmes.

For those wishing to add Mind & Body practice into their existing routine she has this suggestion; *“Join a class rather than doing it yourself from a book or video, as there is a huge benefit from personal help and corrections. If you don't like one class, try another as there are many styles and teacher personalities to choose from”*.

While the injury and health risks associated with more gentle Mind & Body are arguably lower than those of a higher impact or intensity workout, keeping safe and exercising at a level that is suitable for you is just as important.

Important considerations before getting started

The first sign that you are in the right place to get a safe and effective Mind & Body exercise is that the instructor or facility undertakes a pre-screening process to make sure there are no reasons or health issues that would indicate participation is a risk.

Secondly, the instructor or trainer should offer modifications throughout the class to enable all participants to achieve at the right level.

However, if you are not sure exactly how to measure whether your instructor or trainer is the right one, check that they are REPs registered, as it's the recognised standard to ensure safe and effective exercise advice in New Zealand.

Contact details for further information about the exercise industry:

NZ Register of Exercise Professionals, Registrar Stephen Gacsal

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NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs) - Independent not for profit quality mark of exercise professionals and facilities. Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the “warrant of fitness check” that exercise professionals and facilities meet New Zealand and internationally benchmarked standards to deliver safe exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 210,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - www.icreps.org

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Exercise Association of New Zealand - Not for profit exercise industry representative organisation. Its *mission is to proactively support a sustainable exercise and fitness industry in New Zealand by growing participation in structured exercise through advocacy, information and industry standards.*

