

A woman with short, wavy white hair is shown in profile, performing a yoga pose. She is wearing a white t-shirt and a small pearl earring. Her right arm is extended upwards and slightly to the right, with her hand open and fingers spread. Her head is tilted back, and she is looking upwards. In the background, other people are visible, also in yoga poses, but they are out of focus. The setting appears to be a yoga studio with a light-colored wall and a blue mat.

Nia Movement for Healing

A Gentle Approach to Flexibility, Mobility,
and Energy Renewal for Cancer Patients

Nia means the body's way, a holistic movement practice that goes beyond traditional exercise. It's designed to foster healing by tapping into the body's natural ability to move with joy and intention.

Debra Reis, MSN, RN

Cancer patients often face physical and emotional challenges that can limit movement and drain energy. The journey toward healing is as much about nurturing the spirit as treating the body. One of the most powerful tools I've found in my practice is Nia, a unique fusion fitness program that beautifully blends the expressive movements of dance, the power and precision of martial arts, and the balance and mindfulness of the healing arts. As a certified Nia instructor and holistic health practitioner, I've seen firsthand how this gentle movement therapy can transform the lives of cancer survivors, offering them a path to increased flexibility, mobility, and overall mind-body-spirit balance.

WHAT IS NIA?

Nia means the body's way, a holistic movement practice that goes beyond traditional exercise. It's designed to foster healing by tapping into the body's natural ability to move with joy and intention. Nia incorporates elements from nine different movement forms, including the martial arts (Tai Chi, Tae Kwon Do, Aikido), the dance arts (jazz dance, modern dance, Duncan dance), and the healing arts (yoga, the Feldenkrais Method®, and the Alexander Technique). This blend creates a versatile experience that adapts to the needs and abilities of each individual, making it especially suitable for those recovering from illness or injury.



The essence of Nia lies in its adaptability and accessibility. Movements are to a diverse range of music, allowing participants to connect deeply with their body sensations. The focus is on feeling body sensations of ease and grace. If there is any discomfort, the participant is encouraged to change or adapt the move to their body's way.

Each class is structured around simple, joyful movements that promote physical strength, cardiovascular health, and emotional well-being. But beyond the physical, Nia is also about the energy flow within the body, helping individuals connect with their inner selves in a profound and transformative way.

NIA FOR CANCER SURVIVORS: A PATHWAY TO HEALING

For cancer survivors, the journey through diagnosis, treatment, and recovery can be incredibly taxing, both physically and emotionally. Many survivors experience a range of challenges post-treatment, including fatigue, reduced mobility, and a sense of disconnection from their bodies. Nia offers a gentle, non-intimidating approach to movement that addresses these issues holistically.

1. Increasing Flexibility and Mobility:

Cancer treatments often leave survivors with stiffness and reduced range of motion, particularly if surgery or radiation is involved. Nia's movements are designed to gently stretch and mobilize the body, promoting joint flexibility and muscular coordination. The dance elements encourage fluidity and grace, allowing participants to rediscover the joy of movement without the pressure of perfection.

2. Energy Renewal:

Fatigue is a common side effect for many cancer survivors, lingering long after treatment has ended. Nia's focus on breath, rhythm, and mindful

movement helps to awaken and circulate energy throughout the body. By engaging in Nia, participants often find their energy levels renewed, and many report feeling more vibrant and alive after just a few sessions. The martial arts components of Nia, such as Tae Kwon Do and Aikido, empower participants, helping them tap into a sense of inner strength and resilience.

3. Mind-Body-Spirit Balance:

The trauma of cancer can lead to a sense of disconnection from one's own body. Nia provides a safe space for survivors to reconnect with themselves, promoting a sense of wholeness and self-acceptance. The healing arts components of Nia, including yoga and the Feldenkrais Method, encourage introspection and mindfulness, allowing participants to tune into their bodies and emotions compassionately. This holistic approach fosters a balanced state where mind, body, and spirit work in harmony, supporting overall well-being.

4. Emotional Release and Joyful Movement:

One of Nia's unique aspects is its emphasis on joy and self-expression. The dance arts components allow participants to move freely, releasing pent-up emotions and stress in a safe and supportive environment. This release can be incredibly healing, providing an outlet for emotions that may have been suppressed during the rigors of cancer treatment.

NIA IN PRACTICE: REAL-LIFE IMPACT

In my work with cancer survivors, I've witnessed Nia's transformative power. For example, Susan, a breast cancer survivor, found that Nia helped her navigate physical rehab with grace and ease. The gentle movements eased her stiffness and gave her shoulder and arm flexibility. The positive, community-oriented environment of the class gave her a renewed sense of purpose and joy. She described feeling more connected to her body than she had in years, and

this reconnection was a critical part of her healing journey.

Another participant, John, struggled with severe fatigue and a sense of isolation after his treatment. Through Nia, he discovered a new way to move that brought him joy and revitalized him. The rhythmic movements and guided breathwork helped him manage his energy levels more effectively, allowing him to participate more fully in his life and enjoy moments with his family.

BRINGING NIA INTO YOUR LIFE

Whether you're a cancer survivor looking to regain strength and balance or seeking a gentle yet powerful way to enhance your overall well-being, Nia offers a pathway to healing accessible to all. Classes can be modified to suit individual needs, ensuring that everyone can participate regardless of fitness level or mobility.

I invite you to explore Nia as a way to reconnect with your body, rejuvenate your spirit, and embrace the healing power of joyful movement. In a world that often feels heavy and overwhelming, Nia reminds us that movement can be light, liberating, and deeply restorative.

Step into a Nia class and discover how this gentle movement therapy can support your journey to wellness. Let's dance, breathe, and heal together—one step at a time. €



Learn more about author Debra Reis by visiting www.debrareis.com

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