

Helen Terry,
NIA instructor

Moves that soothe

IT LOOKS WEIRD AND YOU HAVE TO SHOUT A LOT BUT A NEW WORKOUT CALLED NIA IS THE HOTTEST WAY TO SHAPE UP AND DE-STRESS

WORDS ANGIE NEWSON PHOTOGRAPHS JUSTIN QUICK

At the end of the 90s, we've wised up to the fact that exercise can benefit more than the body. Yes, we want toned thighs and a firm bottom but we also want relaxation and peace of mind. More and more of us are making time for regular yoga, Pilates or tai chi classes. And, next year, if US trends are anything to go by, we'll all be queuing up for NIA. Pronounced 'neeyah', it's a mind-body-spirit technique that's been around in the US for 16 years, first gaining cult status and then mainstream appeal.

NIA stands both for Non-Impact Aerobics and for Neuromuscular Integrative Action. It's a class you do in bare feet with an instructor who focuses on alignment and body awareness.

'NIA is an imaginative programme that integrates aerobic conditioning, balance and flexibility,' says Dr James Garrick, Director of the Center For Sports Medicine at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital in San Francisco, 'and, although high in energy, it appears

you could be asked to dance like a ballerina one minute and shout and stamp your feet like a child the next.

Unlike traditional exercise classes, NIA has no set structure or movements to follow; it's all about allowing your imagination to move your body. 'In regular aerobics, a teacher does her stuff and the class just follows,' says Helen Terry, the British-born NIA instructor now based in Houston, Texas, who devised *The Zest NIA workout* (right). 'But, with NIA, we work with energy and I get the feel for where to take the class.' You may be asked to imagine, for instance, that the floor is a sea of electrical sockets and, every time you take a step, you're plugging your foot in and out of the sockets and drawing in energy. Or maybe you'll be moving through space as if you are speed-skating, gliding from side to side.

But this is not just a grown-up version of the movement-and-dance classes you did in junior school; it's also a serious workout,

call more muscles into play on the Lake District run because of the 3-D nature of running on uneven surfaces. NIA uses 3-D movements, too, meaning you get a total body workout.'

But, let's face it, not all of us relish the idea of forming a circle, running in and shouting 'Yes!' 'When I first went to a NIA class, I was overcome with emotion,' says Jane Stechman, Aerobics Co-ordinator at Cannons Health Club And Spa in London. 'I found many of the techniques very powerful.'

Don't worry: you won't be pushed into declaiming like a crazed RADA reject. 'Some beginners don't use their voices at first,' says Terry. 'That comes with confidence. But our training makes us listen to our class participants: we don't take them anywhere they feel uncomfortable. In the end, though, most people find making lots of noise is a great stress-reliever.'

Katherine Gillard, 31, first tried NIA last year in the US. 'I find it difficult to keep up in traditional exercise classes,' she says. 'NIA is just the sort of fitness class I was looking for. I enjoy moving freely and connecting with my inner sensations. After a hard day, I just channel energy into my movements and relax immediately. I lose sight of any inhibitions and it's as if my body talks to me as I move. My co-ordination has greatly improved.'

Emma Thomas, 26, a recent NIA convert, agrees. 'This is the first type of mind-body class I've experienced,' she says, 'and I find it complements my gym sessions perfectly. And it's fun and very social.'

Not sure if it's for you? Why not give our workout a try and see? We think you may surprise yourself. 'I always say NIA is like chocolate,' says Terry. 'I can tell you how great it is but you really have to taste it yourself to find out what I'm talking about.' ■

'I used to be a size 16 and now I'm a size 8. And I don't do anything but NIA' HELEN TERRY (ABOVE), NIA INSTRUCTOR

to be both safe and adaptable to people of virtually any fitness level.'

NIA was created by Debbie Rosas, an aerobics teacher, and her husband Carlos, a former tennis pro, in the early 80s. Both were teaching aerobics in California when they started to wonder why classes had to involve jumping up and down so fast. What was missing from gym timetables, they felt, was a class that was both easier on the body and more engaging on the mind. As a result, they evolved a technique that combined Eastern and Western movements, from taekwondo, tai chi and yoga to the Alexander technique, Rolfing, jazz and dance, set to music as varied as ambient and reggae. In the class,

involving the whole body, not just the arms and legs. 'It's challenging, satisfying and it burns calories,' says Terry. 'It's great for giving you that sleek, lean, toned look. I used to be a size 16 and now I am a size 8. And I don't do anything but NIA.'

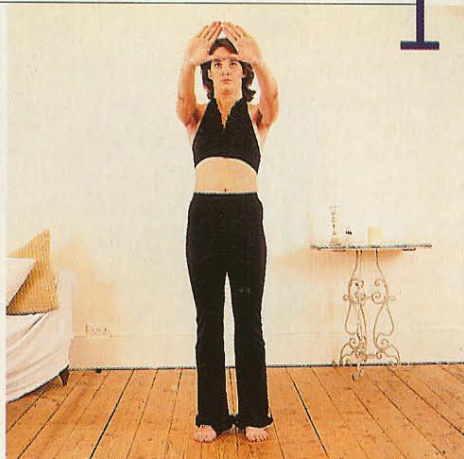
It's certainly a technique that's impressed exercise physiologist Philip van Klink, who works at The Laboratory Spa And Health Club in London. 'As well as aerobic conditioning,' he says, 'NIA offers enhanced neuromuscular co-ordination, resulting in increased functional fitness. And it's the kind of fitness you can use in your day-to-day activities. Compare running on a treadmill with running through the winding tracks of the Lake District: you'd

THE ZEST NIA WORKOUT

This simple home workout was devised by Helen Terry to be done 3 times a week. It should take about half an hour, with each exercise lasting about 4 minutes. Try playing music such as Annie Lennox's *Medusa* or Enya's *Shepherd Moons* in the background.

THE TRIAD

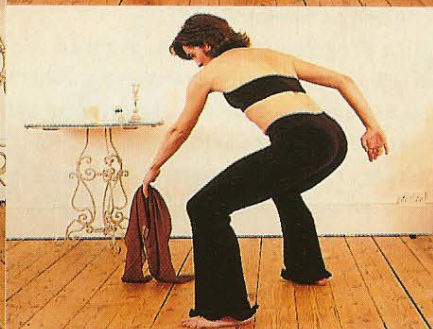
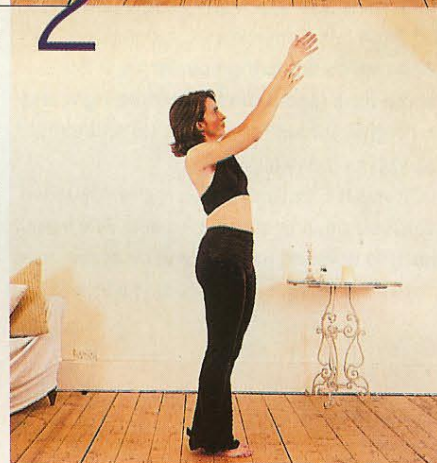
[A] Stand comfortably, with your feet hip-width apart and your knees soft.
 [B] Stretch your arms out, touching your thumbs and forefingers together to make a triangle shape in front of your face (see picture, right). Look through your triangle and breathe. Relax your shoulders. Think 'GRACE': Grounded; Relaxed; Aware; Centred; Energy.
 [C] Concentrate on 'feeling' the ground beneath your bare feet and, as you look through the triangle, focus on your intentions for the workout. Picture yourself as an athlete preparing for an event.



THE ROBIN HOOD

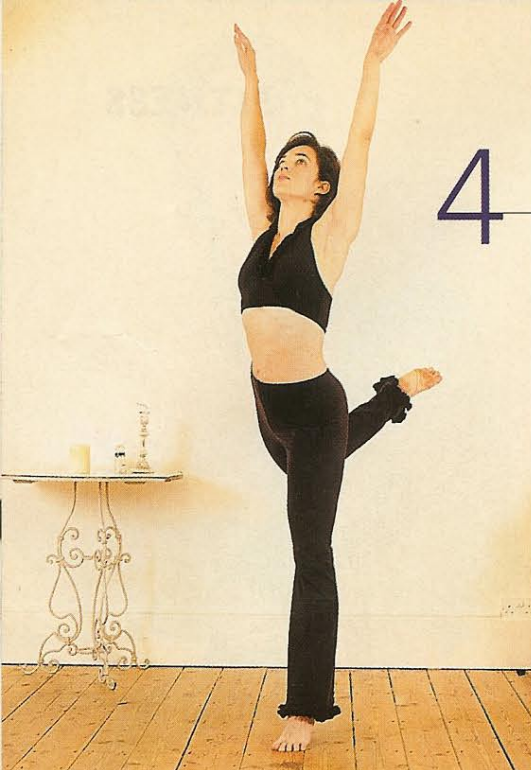
[A] Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Take one step back and to the side, so that your legs are wide apart, with your feet pointing out and your knees over your feet. Raise your left arm, so your fingers are pointing to the point where the wall meets the ceiling. Keeping your pelvis stable, bend your knees, inhale and lean back. Look along your extended arm and bend your other arm as if you're holding onto a bow (see picture, top right). Point your

outstretched fingers where your 'arrow' is to go and invite the feeling of open space between your ribs and left hip.
 [B] Use your tummy, legs and bottom to bring you back up: focus on the feeling of pushing. As you come up, bring your legs back to being hip-width apart and lift your right arm up until it's in line with your left, as though you've 'shot your arrow' (see picture, right). Now 'blow' the arrow away and return to the starting position.
 [C] Repeat the whole thing 8 times on each side. Reduce the repetitions to 4 times on each side, then 2 times each side, then once on the left side and once on the right.



THE CAPE

[A] Stand with your feet wide apart. Bring your right hand across your body and over to the left in a sweeping, circular motion, as if you are wearing a cape and wrapping it over your shoulder. If you like, you can use a piece of clothing to help you (see picture, far left).
 [B] Now repeat the same movement with your left hand (see picture, top left).
 [C] Repeat these two moves but now start to bend your knees deeply (see picture, left). As you sweep to the left with your right hand, turn your right foot inwards; as you sweep to the right, turn your left foot in. As you 'sweep and sink', exhale. As you rise up, breathe in and smell the air, filling yourself with new energy. Continue for 3 minutes. ▶



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THE ANGEL

[A] Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Raise your arms up and, at the same time, step forward onto your left foot, roll up onto the ball of that foot and raise your right leg off the floor (see picture, far left). While you're up there, imagine you are an angel with wings.

[B] Return to the starting position. Move both hands out to the side, parallel to the floor. Imagine you have laser beams coming out of your fingertips, lighting up your room (see picture, left). Say 'Huh!' or, if you've had a bad day, 'No!' or 'Yes!'

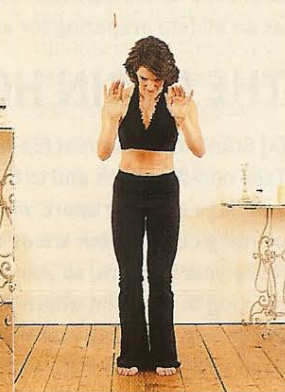
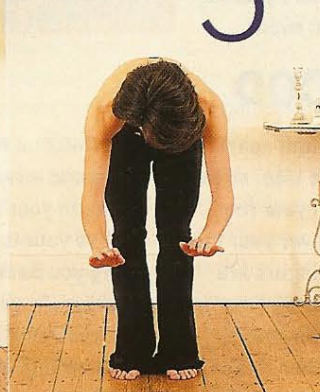
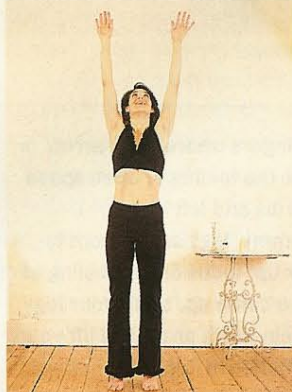
[C] Repeat 8 times on each side. Reduce the repetitions to 4 times on each side, then 2 times each side, then once on the left side and once on the right.

THE WAVE

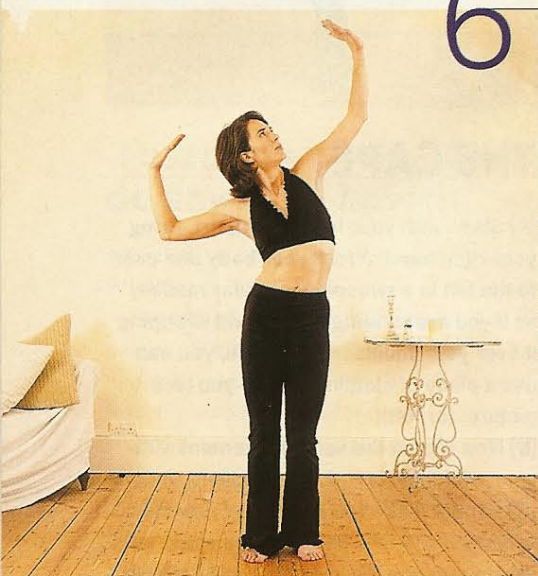
[A] Stand with your feet hip-width apart and your knees soft. Raise your arms above your head and reach tall (see picture, right).

[B] Then bend your knees and sink downwards, lowering your arms at the same time (see pictures, middle right and far right). Inhale as you rise up and exhale as you sink down.

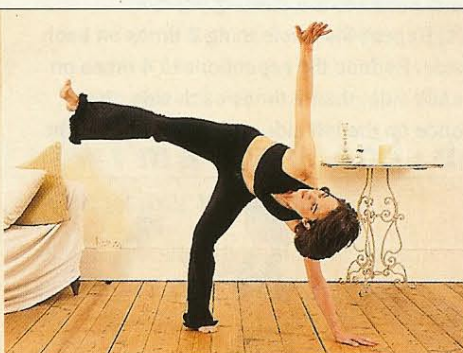
[C] Repeat 8 times. As you move, visualise yourself moving with the ocean. Allow your body to flow and the waves to be continuous. You are a wave flowing from sea to sky.



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THE BUBBLE

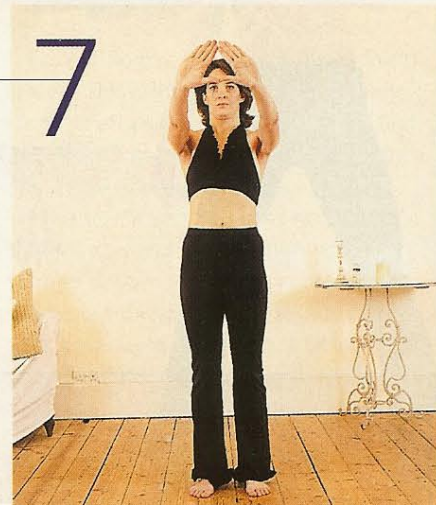
[A] Cool down and stretch by imagining you are inside a huge bubble. Use any and every part of your body to press all sides of the bubble outwards (see pictures, far left and left). Really focus on the feeling of reaching and stretching. Become aware of the various parts of your body that need to be stretched more than others. Think of all your moves as cat-like.

THE TRIAD

[A] Return to the first move of the workout. Recognise that the workout is coming to an end and remember GRACE.

[B] Looking through your triangle, take three slow breaths: the first inhalation signifies the past; the second inhalation the present, and the third inhalation the future. As you take the third breath, take two steps forward, walk 'through' your triangle and into the future.

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● Helen Terry will be running a series of masterclasses and workshops throughout the UK this autumn. For more details, call Fitness Professionals on 0990 133434 or e-mail LHmotivation@earthlink.com