

getting physical

by Marci McNaghten

Body Smarts

Struggling with a problem at work or home? Let your body help you find the solution.

"Kinesthetic intelligence—the intelligence of the body—is often an untapped resource that people can use to become more effective in their problem-solving and thinking processes," says Thomas Armstrong, author of *7 Kinds of Smart*.

Try the following exercise to see how your body and mind can work together: Write down a problem—describing it in detail—then list as many possible solutions to it as you can. Next, put the paper aside, and focus on your body and its sensations for a moment. Then read each solution, and note any changes in your body awareness. Do your muscles tighten or relax? Do you feel an uncomfortable burning sensation or a warm glow anywhere in your skin? Cross out solutions that stimulate negative reactions, and circle those that are positive.

Your body can also help you generate ideas during exercise. The next time you work out, suggests Armstrong, let your mind wander freely—enjoy the sensory delights of the outdoors, or take pleasure in moving your body after sitting at a desk all day. When ideas pop into your mind, remember them so you can jot them down later.

"Our minds and our bodies are not separate—a circular connection leads from one to the other. As a result, when we keep our bodies in shape and remain aware of their subtle sensations we can also enhance our minds," says Armstrong.

Buying Home-Gym Equipment

As the weather turns wintry, an investment in home-fitness equipment can keep you healthy. But buy wisely; a poor pick won't do much for your fitness level or your pocketbook.

When purchasing large machines such as stationary bicycles, stair climbers, or rowing machines, test the equipment at the store, recommends Gerald Couzens, author of *How to Get the Best from Your Home Fitness Equipment*. "You need to learn how the item works and if you work well on it."

As you shop around, also examine the equipment's quality. Does it look and feel well-made (signs include sturdy and well-welded joints and a smooth paint finish)? Does the piece feel solid and durable when you try it out? Are the movements smooth (not jerky)? Lower quality

equipment, which often costs less, may seem like a bargain—until it breaks down or wobbles so much you avoid using it. With home-fitness products that you can't test, such as those advertised on television, be extra wary about quality.

When choosing smaller pieces of home gym equipment, try to avoid items that work just one part of the body (like the abdomen or thighs). These won't give you many fitness benefits and are not cost-effective. "You need equipment that will improve your overall aerobic conditioning or muscle strength," says Melanie Roberts, interim fitness center director at the National Institute for Fitness and Sport in Indianapolis. Besides the large machines, you can accomplish this with such products as step benches, slide boards, dumbbells, or exercise bands.

Stressbuster: Telephone Tricks

Relieve tension while on the telephone with this move from Trudi Gavin, creator of *The Phone and Tone Workout*. As you talk, stand with your back straight, navel pressed in toward your spine, ribs pulled up from the hips, and chest held high. Press shoulder blades together, and touch the back of your head with the palm of your free hand. Your elbow should be out to the side. Relax, then repeat for a total of 20 times on each side. For a free brochure detailing Gavin's program, call (800) 647-5474.

What to Wear? What to Wear?

The many sportswear fabrics and fibers available today can boggle the mind. But shopping can be easy if you know what you're buying. Consider the following from Title 9 Sports in Berkeley, California.

■ **Cotton:** A soft, natural fiber that breathes well (which reduces overheating) and absorbs perspiration. However, cotton retains much of this moisture and may become damp—a potential problem during cold-weather workouts.

■ **Spandex (also known as Lycra):** A stretchy fiber that is almost always blended with other fibers, such as nylon or cotton. Unfortunately, some spandex blends can promote bacteria growth (which may lead to yeast infection) because they do not pull moisture away from the body. Look for built-in liners to offset this.

■ **Coolmax:** A mesh fabric used in liners for aerobic wear, running shorts, and bras that keeps you dry because it breathes well, absorbs perspiration, and promotes rapid evaporation.

■ **Supplex:** A new type of nylon, commonly used in fitness shorts and aerobic wear, that is soft like cotton. It is also very durable and dries more quickly than cotton.

■ **Wool:** Often worn as an insulating middle layer in cold weather. Wool keeps you warm even when it gets wet. However, it can be very heavy and bulky, and some people may have a skin sensitivity or be allergic to wool.

■ **Polar fleece:** Also worn as an insulating layer. Plush polar fleece weighs less than wool and is easier to care for. □

Choices abound (from top to bottom): Coolmax-Lycra bra top, cotton-Lycra bodysuit, Supplex unitard, nylon-Lycra tank bodysuit.



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