

Exercise and pain: The Purpose of Pain

By Anat Baniel

“No pain-no gain” is a deeply ingrained belief and practice that leads to unnecessary injury, pain and limitations, which counteracts the purpose and potential benefits of exercise.

Are you one of the many people who have chosen to lead a healthier life style and are following one or more exercise and fitness systems like Yoga, Pilates, weight training, conditioning training and more? Are you at the same time finding yourself needing to battle different kinds of pain, like back pain, muscle strain, joint pain, all resulting from these physical fitness activities? Or maybe you have already had to give up on your decision to improve your health and fitness through exercise due to pain.

Rest assured, you are not alone. In the past 10-15 years awareness of the importance of exercise to our health and wellness has grown rapidly and with it more and more people of all ages are becoming involved in a variety of exercise and fitness programs.

This is a very positive trend. However, an interesting phenomenon is occurring. The incidence of sports and exercise-related injuries from various kinds of exercise, including cycling, running, aerobics, yoga, stretching, weight training and even golfing, has skyrocketed. Sports injuries account for the majority of emergency room cases. The United States alone spends over \$1 billion dollars a year in money and manpower to treat and care for sports-related injuries. It is important to ask how can it be that something that is so important to our health as fitness, exercising and sports, can be so injurious and detrimental at the same time.

Through my experience over the past 27 years working with thousands of people I discovered that it is the *WAY* in which we perform the movements of the exercise that will decide whether it is going to be beneficial to us, or also injurious. It is not enough to do the movements of the exercise anyway we can. It is necessary to organize the movements in a harmonious way in order to prevent injury and maximize performance.

Common belief, however, holds that one has not actually had a good workout unless one feels some pain. The old adage “no pain, no gain” is still very prevalent. We are told that the aches, pains and in some cases, injuries we experience as a result of exercising are a necessary part of the process. Sometimes we are even led to believe that the pain and injury is proof of how hard we exercised and that is necessary in order to progress. Many

would find it hard to believe if someone achieved great physical strength and agility and said they never “suffered” to accomplish it. We watch the most accomplished athletes and frequently observe injury and pain.

What most people don't know is that excessive force and poorly organized force in movement *destroys* body tissue. Pain is the body's way of signaling that some aspect of the movement is causing damage and is limiting the performance level. The body tries to protect itself from further damage causing movement. Whether we want it or not, we unconsciously make changes in our movement to avoid pain and thus we create further problems and exacerbate the existing damage.

Our bodies continued attempt to take care of the danger posed by poorly organized movements also drains us of enormous amounts of energy. This is vital energy that could have gone into productive activity. Ask anyone who deals with chronic pain and they will tell you how incredibly exhausting and limiting the experience is. Even minor or occasional pain can drain our energy due to the continuous attention given to it and because of the compensatory changes that are being made without our knowledge. We are built to pay attention to pain so we can protect ourselves.

Fortunately harmonious, well-organized movement is possible and available for everyone at any age. Yet few people move spontaneously with the perfection so obvious, for instance, in animals in the wild. Most of us do not know how to organize our movement as well as we could.

There are ways to inform our brains so that we quickly and easily acquire better movement patterns. These new patterns of movement not only eliminate pain and give the body a chance to heal from injuries, but they also greatly improve our performance. We gain in strength and flexibility. We find ourselves doing easily what was hard and even unattainable before. Whether it is walking, running, Yoga, tennis, golf or daily movements like: bending down, twisting to look back, reaching up or lifting an object, it all becomes easier and better. When the movements are done in a safe way for our bodies, pain is greatly reduced; it becomes less frequent and eventually disappears all together. One can improve in ways never before imagined.

We need to change our perception about pain and its importance to our body's health and wholeness. Our ambition, while doing our best, leads us to damage ourselves. Pain is the signal that such damage is occurring.

Pain provides us with the opportunity to detect mistakes in how we do the movements and change the way we exercise and perform the sport. It is of utter importance to change our beliefs about pain and our understanding as to how to achieve our goals.

The Anat Baniel Method, based on the teachings of Dr. Feldenkrais is an established and scientifically based method which helps achieve greater flexibility, strength and control over one's body while reducing pain, limitation, and injury. This method is based in the understanding that the brain organizes all of our movements and that there are specific

conditions we need in order for the brain to do its job well. One learns to recognize unnecessary force, poorly organized movement, and replace it with comfort, safety and harmonious movement. We continuously discover new possibilities for ourselves.

The method offers a great variety of movement lessons, through which we get access to our internal design, and naturally achieve our physical goals without the destructive elements that culminate in pain. Comfort and pleasure should be our guide when moving and exercising.

For additional information visit www.banielfeldenkraistraining.com and www.anatbanielmethod.com