

GYROKINESIS® Exercise

Movement for a new millennium.

Soft-spoken but with a dynamic, powerful, almost lyrical undertone, Juliu Horvath, creator and founder of Gyrotonic exercise and the Gyrotonic Expansion System®, begins instructing his Level 1 Gyrotonic class: “Sit up straight; gather your energies, straight but soft, so that your spine is like a child’s, slightly wobbling, so the flesh of your body can relax on the top of your bones. Enter into your bone structure, close your eyes for a moment, and just feel that everywhere your bones are completely, completely resting, hanging practically, relaxing. Try to carry this relaxation throughout the whole system so all the movements, especially in the beginning, should be soft but concrete, firm a little bit, but still very soft. Now come out of it, and keep this mood while you begin to awaken your senses. . . .”

Gyrotonic exercise is the 65-year-old Hungarian-born Horvath’s first love, which he created more than 25 years ago after injuring himself as a professional ballet dancer. It is a total-body conditioning and balancing system of movement that encourages the spine and joints to stay open and strong. The work stimulates the anatomy’s major organ systems and incorporates special breathing techniques, particular to each group of exer-

cises within the methodology. Fluidity of motion while performing the moves is also a key premise.

The system’s unique movement signature is “three-dimensional, using gentle repetitive circling, spiraling and undulating exercises in a set rhythm,” says master trainer Magali Messac of Gyrotonic Seattle, a former principal ballerina for American Ballet Theatre. “Most importantly, an energetic polarity is encouraged by simultaneously reaching in opposite directions, creating both internal balance and support. Through the constant ebb-and-flow and push-and-pull movements, connective tissues are prompted to maintain their suppleness.”

In the past, Gyrotonic has been described as embracing the basic principles of yoga, swimming, dance, tai chi and gymnastics, but Horvath says his system has evolved owing to many years of experimentation and intense study. As he puts it, “People will experience the same benefits from Gyrotonic and Gyrotonic as they do from these other modalities, but my work is not derived from these other systems.”

Advocates of the method maintain that regular practice fosters increased mo-

bility, assists the body’s regenerative capacity and opens energetic pathways, increasing blood flow and oxygenation. The result, they say, is a renewed sense of vitality and well-being.

“Your body is basically a repository for the physical and emotional trauma that you have been through in your life. It records this information internally, like a videotape; what Gyrotonic does is erase that tape,” says Billy Macagnone, master trainer and owner of Body Evolution studio in New York City. “[With practice,] the body will regenerate and reorganize after pain and injury or from incorrect or [insufficient] movement. The benefit of the work, bottom line, is a new home for your body.”

Three Key Principles

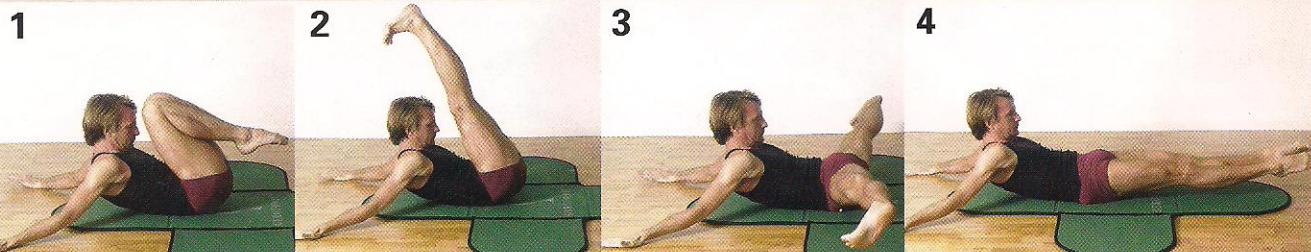
The Gyrotonic methodology incorporates many varied concepts, but three key principles are important to consider, according to the master trainers interviewed for this article.

1. Narrowing of the Pelvis. This principle, which applies in all positions (sitting, standing and lying down), facilitates the creation of space between the vertebrae. In a contrasting movement (i.e., a

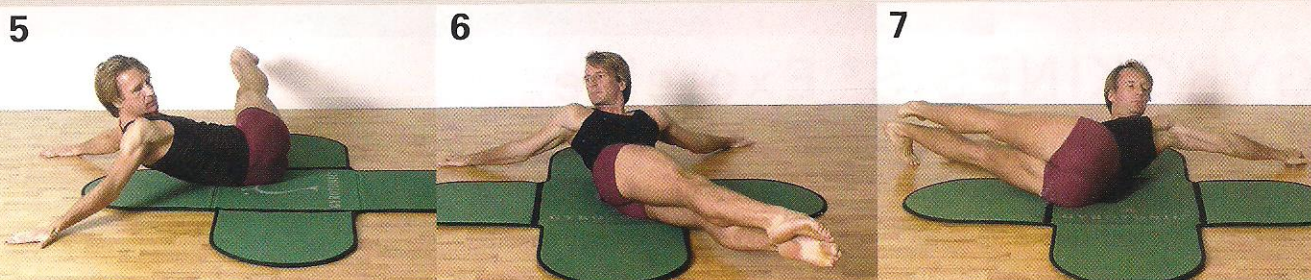
gyrokinesis abdominal sequence

The abdominal exercises are the last sequence performed in the main part of a Gyrokinesis class. Here, master trainer Sebastian Plettenberg demonstrates some of the abdominal movements. The complete sequence consists of nine interconnected exercises, which are performed 8–16 times each and take approximately 7 minutes to execute.

Horvath says he conceived these combinations in order to reach “the uncharted territory of the abdominals that are difficult to engage. The abdominals are contracted, release and extend through one cycle of the [sequence, releasing] the stiffening effect of the standard abdominal exercises.”



Photographs 1–4 illustrate a fluid combination of moves designed to strengthen the abdominals, mobilize the hips and stretch the legs.



Photographs 5–7 show what Horvath describes as a “very demanding and complex” series of moves requiring mobility of the spine and low back. In this synchronized movement pattern, the legs move side to side like a rhythmical pendulum in contrast to a spiraling twist of the body. The combination consists of moving the legs in a diagonal pattern from the front and then to the left and right sides next to the arms.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRUCE HIBBS; COURTESY OF GYROTONIC® INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

movement in which parts of the body simultaneously reach in opposite directions), the body’s energy spreads upward to elevate the spine while, at the same time, the legs and feet connect to the ground, spreading energy downward. Between these two contrasting motions, the pelvis must be properly positioned in order to provide spinal support, and narrowing accomplishes that. Physical therapist and master trainer Johannes Randolf of Linz, Austria, describes the technique this way: “A basis for all the work, it is a unique type of muscle engagement that incorporates among [other areas] the pelvic floor (without “just” squeezing), the transverse muscle and the oblique muscles. If one does [narrowing] correctly, the spine will automatically be lengthened and the disks supported. Many of my patients/clients move in a small range and build up the deep inner

muscles that support the spine’s movements right at the joints. Through that training, the deep inner stability gets better very quickly.”

2. The Fifth Line. What Horvath calls the principle of the Fifth Line is not considered an anatomical reference, but rather a way to integrate the body’s own internal energetic support into the exercise experience. “It can be compared to central currents of electricity that move through the spine, the arms and the legs. This energy can enter and exit freely, and clients are taught to reach from their center, through these energetic lines, while performing Gyrokinesis movements,” explains Matt Aversa, vice president and chief operating officer of Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis International Headquarters.

Master trainer Lisa Marie Goodwin of White Crane Movement Arts in Marina

del Rey, California, links her description of the Fifth Line to Narrowing of the Pelvis: “The . . . Fifth Line through the legs represents the direction of forces of energy executed down and out from the Narrowing of the Pelvis. If you simply think of four lines on the leg being the anterior, posterior, medial and lateral, then the Fifth Line would be the center. One may like to think of it as the energy of the bone marrow extending out from the lower back through the heels. The Fifth Line is really not only a straight line of energy; it’s more of a continual flow, whether it is in the form of an arch, a side bend or a forward bend. We want to be working through the Fifth Line of our spine, and limbs, at all times.”

3. The Seed Center. Goodwin believes that the third principle, the Seed Center, is organically linked to Horvath’s other two axioms and that all three are designed

to work together. "The Seed Center, or yolk center, is that place of germination where the life force begins. It starts from the energy body and moves into the physical or anatomical body," she says. Aversa describes it as "the engine of the organism, where the body's energy is activated, where one's strength and vitality originate. In Gyrokinesis we begin moving from that place to awaken this vitality and release blocked or dormant energy." Working from the Seed Center, according to Goodwin, allows students to connect with the moves on a deeper level.

Class Content and Structure

Instruction is offered at all levels, beginner to advanced, with classes lasting approximately 90 minutes. During each session, the entire body is taken through seven types of spinal movement: bending forward, extending backward, side-arching left and right, twisting left and right, and moving in a circular pattern. Classes begin on low, padded stools, either 16 or 20 inches tall; continue on the floor; and finish with participants standing. Exercises follow a special sequence that naturally divides the class into three sections: preparation; "the main part" (as Horvath calls it); and ending.

Preparation. As you would expect, the purpose of this section is to open up and prepare the body. The exercise sequence presented is called "awakening of the senses" and is designed to create a passageway for energy to begin flowing within the body and to facilitate the release of toxins. Also called an "energy wash," the process uses self-massage of the eyes, ears, feet and organs to stimulate the body and prepare it for more vigorous movement.

The Main Part. This section includes five of the seven movement sequences. It begins with the "spinal-motion" series, during which participants arch, curl, twist, side-shift and undulate the spine while sitting on the Gyrokinesis stool. Each maneuver has its own unique, gentle breathing pattern. "Everything begins and ends with the movement of the spine. It is the conductor. The energy is found at the base and must rise up and down to stimulate the vertebrae," says Macagnone.

Then comes the "connecting" series, which is performed on the floor. Various exercises link the upper and lower anatomy through the body's Seed Center.

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—Billy Macagnone, master trainer

The movements are more intense, and the breathing is more specific and rhythmic. The "hip and knee mobilization" series follows; also done on the floor, this sequence encourages rotation and articulation of the knee and hip joints.

The "back-strengthening" series is next. This family of rigorous arching movements, executed with the front of the pelvis on the floor, involves lifting the arms and legs off the floor in various combinations. "In this position you are strengthening the lower back and sacrum and achieving more length in the torso by reaching arms in front and legs behind," explains Macagnone.

The last series in the main part consists of the "abdominal" exercises, performed on the floor. These moves are described as "intense" because they marry a special squeezing breath with dynamic exercises such as leg pumps, alternating leg lifts and lateral as well as circular movements targeting the entire abdominal structure (see "Gyrokinesis Abdominal Sequence" on page 106).

Ending. This final section, also called "unwinding," is "for the purpose of returning to an upright posture and, through oscillating movements, to subtly 'imprint' the experience [of the class] on an energetic basis," says Messac. Performed standing, the ending series is an inward journey of observation and meditation, designed to restore balance to the body. Participants swirl, shift from side to side, and walk in small figure-eight patterns. As the sequence progresses, people are asked, with eyes closed, to visualize making figure eights on the ceiling: "I suggest clients imagine that they are a pencil standing on their eraser. The pencil point is making figure eights on the ceiling. The entire body then begins to let go, to sway, responding to all the energy that has been moving through the spine for the past hour and a half," explains master trainer Cori Doetzer of Root Awakening in Milford, Pennsylvania. Class ends with a few quiet moments of breathing and/or meditation.

An Exercise System for Everyone

Gyrokinesis can be adapted for a broad range of clients, from the super-athlete to the physically compromised or disabled person. "In a rehabilitation setting," says Messac, who has been working with the system since 1983, "the movements need to be kept simple, accessible, with [multiple gentle] repetitions just below the range at which the person experiences restriction, so as to gently encourage the injured area to open up and strengthen without causing aggravation. The goal is really the same for anyone, even a super-athlete. The person is challenged with

resources

The following master trainers and Gyrotonic Expansion System officers can be consulted for further information regarding the Gyrokinesis certification/training process or general questions about the methodology:

- Matt Aversa, vice president and chief operating officer, Gyrotonic International Headquarters, 134 Dingmans Ct., Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania 18328, (570) 828-0003, www.gyrotonic.com, info@gyrotonic.com.
- Cori Doetzer, The Root Awakening, 207 Meadowridge Acres Rd., Milford, Pennsylvania 18337, (570) 828-9804, www.rootawaken.com.
- Lisa Marie Goodwin, White Crane Movement Arts, 4143 Glencoe Ave., Marina del Rey, California 90292, (310) 821-7200, www.white-crane.net.
- Billy Macagnone, Body Evolution Studio, 221 2nd Ave. New York City, New York 10003, (212) 228-4202, www.bodyevolutions.com.
- Magali Messac, Gyrotonic Seattle, 7409 Greenwood Ave. N., Ste. C, Seattle, Washington 98103, (206) 784-7895, www.gyrotonicseattle.com.



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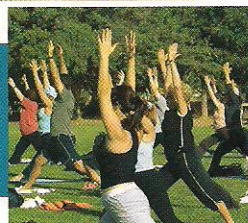
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more and more complex, vigorous and sophisticated movements, studying them in ever-increasing depth.”

Randolf, who like Messac works with clients at every fitness level, believes that flexibility creates stability and that an athlete can gain stability, core strength and range of motion by practicing Gyrokinesis. “Athletes will get new movement experiences, which will enrich their potential, because our bodies learn through variation. They will have more possibilities to choose from and be able to make small corrections within their movements in order to be more successful at their sport,” he says.

After more than 25 years, Gyrokinesis continues to grow worldwide and evolve as a system largely because of Horvath's hands-on involvement at every level. Based on the methodology's strong foundation, he plans to develop additional specialized programs, such as Gyrokinesis for the mature population and for the therapeutic environment. “I am also looking forward to reintroducing Gyrotonic Level 3 for those students who have studied with me for many years. They will be the models for this highly advanced version of Gyrokinesis,” he says.

Disciples of the work believe that, in this complex world, Gyrokinesis—as well as the Gyrotonic Expansion System—is (for some) and should be (for others) an important component of everyday life on many levels—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Enthusiastic about the system's future, as are all of Horvath's master trainers, Macagnone summarizes his feelings: “The work is being used now by Olympic athletes, the ordinary citizen and the elderly, and I truly believe that you will soon see it being performed everywhere from hospitals and rehabilitation centers to gyms and athletic training facilities. What the computer has done for the evolution of technology, Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis are doing for the evolution of the human body.” ■

Rosalind Gray Davis, an award-winning journalist, author and media consultant, is a student of the Gyrotonic Expansion System and a certified Pilates instructor. She has written for a number of major U.S. publications and taught college journalism.

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