



## Neuromuscular Integrated Action

by Sharise Cunningham

You may have heard that the midsection is your body's "core". We often hear this in reference to abdominal or lower back exercises or other activities that work on strengthening the muscles in this area. You must have strong abs to help support your back and vice versa. This area is called the core because our body's strength and stability is centered on the group of muscles that support all of our functional movements. A strong and stable core enables you to train with heavier loads, which increases gains in the rest of the body and aids injury prevention.

The National Association of Sports Medicine (NASM) reports that many people suffer from lower back pain due to being unfit or from sports-related injuries. Keeping the core healthy and strong and in balance with the mind-body connection is the focus of the latest exercise trend called neuromuscular integrated action, or NIA.

NIA (pronounced Nee-ah) is an expressive fitness and awareness movement program designed for men and women of all ages and fitness levels.

NIA is a non-impact aerobic alternative to high impact and repetitive fitness activities, which combines elements of yoga; tai chi; aikido; ethnic and modern dance; and healing arts. Although choreographed, the classes are easy to follow with moves set to inspirational music.

NIA engages your head, shoulders, arms, chest, and legs while providing muscle strength, flexibility and energy. It also challenges and encourages increased range of motion, creativity, balance and strength, and cardiovascular endurance.

Technically speaking, NIA balances the kinetic chain comprised of the soft tissue system (muscle, ligament, tendon, and fascia), neural system, and articular system. These systems are interdependent and weakness in one system must be compensated for by the others. NIA's holistic approach exercises each of the systems to create structural and functional efficiency.

At present, only a handful of local health clubs offer NIA classes. They usually run in 6-8 week increments and can cost between \$10 and \$60 per session. Packages of classes are also available. One place to start your search is the NIA Atlanta website ([www.niaatlanta.com](http://www.niaatlanta.com)) which has a printable coupon that can be used at BodyWise which has studios throughout metro Atlanta.

NIA can be a gentle re-entry into fitness or a full-on cardiovascular workout for the seasoned athlete. Wear loose clothing, be prepared to have fun and work at a pace that's right for you.