



# ALTERNATIVE HEALING

MONTHLY SPECIAL FEATURE

BY RUBINI KAMALAKARAN

**S**TRETCHING is generally considered a warm-up to exercise. The standard practice being 15 to 20 minutes before and after a work out. The goal? Prevention of injury.

The truth is there is a lot more to stretching than the generally accepted beliefs. Effective stretching actually increases strength, improves posture and alignment plus reactivates your muscles (especially dormant ones), besides increasing range of motion and flexibility.

Perhaps most interesting of all, stretching can help you overcome your limits - physically and mentally. In other words, it can help you reach your highest potential.

Just how does it do all this? By challenging your mind and body. Only, in a gentle and non-strenuous way.

## GOING DEEP

The stretching routine that we normally practise before a workout has its limits. For one, it is usually restricted to the general areas i.e. calves, arms, back, shoulders and neck. The other thing is it isn't focused on pushing the body's capability to go deeper into a stretch. This could be due to the general belief that stretching is not as important as the workout itself. Hence, the lack of effort.

Deep stretches tackle not only the general parts of the body but also the uncommon areas, which play an important role in maintaining overall wellbeing. For example, the rise of back, knee, neck and shoulder pains as well as bad posture, which is linked to modern day lifestyle, is generally attributed to shrunken muscles and fascial tissue. A problem, which can be tackled and resolved with deep stretches and improved awareness.

## TOTAL STRETCH

In 1986, Australian athlete and author of the bestseller *Overcome Neck and Back Pain* Kit Laughlin founded Stretch Therapy. It is a comprehensive system that includes stretching, fascial remodeling, strengthening, neural repatterning and relaxation. The goal is overall wellbeing, defined under Stretch Therapy (ST) as physical health and mental clarity. ST develops physical health by working on core strength and flexibility. This is achieved by remapping the mind as well as the body.

"A large part of our approach is to help people overcome their self-

# Stretch therapy

> A revolutionary technique that stretches the body and mind for rehabilitation, general fitness and wellbeing



Wai Kuan helping a student with a supported back bend, to address a 'tight shoulder' ailment.

imposed constraints. Our life experiences including upbringing, work habits and injuries affect our perception of what we can do. We often hear protests like I can't do this. My shoulder/back/knee/relevant body part has been injured or I am naturally stiff. My whole family is stiff," shares Wai Kuan, a certified Stretch Therapy teacher who trained under Laughlin.

## MIND AND BODY CONNECTION

Our physical ability and mental awareness are intertwined. To develop deep core strength and flexibility, neural re-patterning needs to occur.

"Genetically, we inherited a certain shape (i.e. height, body type). Besides our genes, the present form and function of the body is a result of our habits and lifestyle.

"If the present form and function of the body is a result of the past, then we can safely project that future development will follow similar patterns unless certain external forces/stresses are introduced to trigger positive changes. However, our minds tend to resist change and prefer the status quo.

"Using special techniques like

contract-relax approach, pulsations, micro-movements and manipulation of three fundamental neural reflexes, ST effectively helps individuals to overcome and reverse undesired forms and functions of the body.

"The result is improved flexibility achieved by remapping (or stimulating) the somatosensory cortex or what the brain believes the body can do. ST techniques provide sensory feedback of bones, fascia, muscles and nerves of the body to remake the somatosensory cortex for change to happen. The results are a more supple body and also a clearer and more supple mind," explains Wai Kuan.

## INDIVIDUAL WORK

ST teaches us to become aware of our current capacity, to accept its present limits and provides us the tools to safely and effectively expand that capacity.

However, one needs to be actively involved in the process to retain the changes. The brain and senses must be directly involved in doing the work to experience the stretch. "The teacher can only guide. The student must do the work. Any other method will not be effective," says Wai Kuan.

## NO SETS OR REPETITIONS

Stretch therapy does not prescribe sets and repetitions, rather it focuses on the quality of, and the depth of, the experience in the moment.

"Standard methods like hold the stretch for 30 seconds or repeat 30 times are not very effective as a person's physical ability is restricted by their self beliefs, emotions and current fitness level.

"Doing an exercise beyond one's current capability results in sub-optimal body alignment as other body parts come in to help. At best, this is ineffective; at worst, this is how injuries occur," Wai Kuan says.

Also, flexibility cannot be increased by force or by intensity. While ST does use force it is only to a certain extent where the body is brought to a state where the mind is willing to let its protective tendency go (it is part of the brain remapping process).

There is something for everyone with ST. With the exercises layered by complexity and level of challenge, you become aware of your strengths and areas where improvement is needed. ST is practised by thousands of people worldwide, of all ages, fitness levels (including professional athletes) and states of health.

## STRETCH THERAPY: AT A GLANCE

### What is it?

A comprehensive system that includes stretching, fascial remodelling, strengthening, neural re-patterning and relaxation

### What is it for?

- Rehabilitation of specific physical problems (i.e. knee, back and shoulder pains).
- General fitness and wellbeing.
- All the way to improvement of elite athletic performance.

### What does it do?

Develops physical health by working on core strength and flexibility. As well as remapping the mind or what the unconscious part of brain believes it can do. Hence, increasing flexibility and range of motion.

### Who is it for?

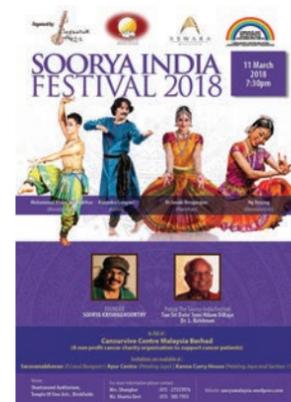
ST is practised by thousands of people worldwide, of all ages, fitness levels (including professional athletes) and states of health. It is also suitable for pregnant women and children.

Wai Kuan is a certified Stretch Therapy teacher and yoga teacher. A former chartered accountant, she started teaching yoga in 2008 and chanced upon Stretch Therapy in 2015. Two years later, the idea of establishing a Stretch Therapy gym in Malaysia was conceived. In 2017, she opened the Stretch Therapy Centre at Damansara Uptown, which offers workshops, group and private classes. For more information, please contact her at [info@stmalaysia.com](mailto:info@stmalaysia.com)

# A show for a good cause

THE annual Soorya India Festival is back and this time it is held in aid of Cansurvive Centre Malaysia, a non-profit organisation that provides support to cancer patients. To be held at the Temple of Fine Arts, the festival will feature world renowned bharanatyam exponent

Dr Janaki Rengarajan and kathak exponent Pandit Rajendra Gangan from India. Also performing will be Malaysian bharanatyam dancers Mohammad Khairi and Xin Ying from Aswara, the National Arts Culture and Heritage Academy. This spectacular celebration of dance will showcase a cross-section of India's rich and cultural heritage. The proceeds raised from



the festival will be channeled to Cansurvive Centre Malaysia, which provides guidance and a compassionate community support for patients who suffer from cancer as well as their family and friends.

### Event details:

Date : March 11  
Time : 7:30pm  
Venue : Shantanand Auditorium, Temple of Fine Arts

Invitations for the show are based on donations of RM30, RM50 and RM100.

For more information, call 011-2755 3976 or 013-385 7955.

