

CHAPTER 1

LIVE IN YOUR BODY



Living comfortably in your own skin costs nothing. Enjoying the stretches, sensations and physical exertion of your body costs nothing. Making the most of the Great Outdoors **costs nothing**.

These are the only tools you will need for eco-fitness. You will learn to be comfortable with yourself, to value exercise and to get a ‘buzz’ out of the natural world.

No gym membership fees are needed to achieve eco-fitness. No expensive kit is required. You will start to genuinely have fun and you will start enjoying exercise, activity and movement.

Our bodies are brilliantly-designed machines and we already have all the building blocks we need to keep fit and healthy. We also are lucky to have a pretty incredible planet to enjoy. We are going to learn how to take advantage of these facts to get fit – just as Mother Nature intended.

The Eco-Fitness Book is packed with information and ideas. They will help you overcome any resistance to physical activity which may have built up through living in a modern, technological civilisation. It will show you how to engage major muscle groups for maximum calorific burn and better body tone. It will help you delve within your personality to help you find your own personal eco-fitness ‘buzz’. And it will arm you with many, many activity ideas – one of which (at least) is bound to float your boat.

First though we may have some obstacles to overcome... Let's get those out of the way straight away! In my past experience of working with people as a sports massage therapist, I have come across a troubling dilemma. Most of us, sadly, don't seem to comfortably INHABIT our bodies.

We don't appreciate our body, let alone love and admire it! We don't *live inside* ourselves with ease and comfort. We avoid exertion at all cost. If we start to 'feel the burn' we stop what we are doing. We don't believe in the brilliantly-designed machine nature has given us. And we've forgotten that nature and everyday living has all we need to be fit and healthy, both physically and mentally.

We don't even know how to walk with maximum efficiency and good posture. We slump from foot to foot using just momentum and the tiniest bit of calf muscle when there's so much more we could be doing.

We cannot squat down using those wonderful strong thigh muscles to power us - keeping our hips supple and lubricated. We aren't sure how to lift things, so we strain our lumbar backs. We don't even realise that our core or abdomen muscles can do much of the work of keeping our torsos upright. We slouch a lot of the time.

Most of us take little joy in stretching like a cat, in sitting quietly sometimes and listening to subtle feelings or aches in our bodies and what secrets they might be telling us, or in enjoying tuning in to the power in our shoulders and forearm muscles when we are cleaning the windows, planting in the garden or even just changing the duvet cover!

It seems as if the body is somehow slightly alien to us – a frightening thing we fight to control. A thing we judge by how it looks. We don't love and appreciate our bodies as a walking, talking vehicle for the mind with all its love, aspirations and ideas. Poor body!

It's no-one's fault that they operate through life like this. I have been the same in the past. Most people are the same. Let's not judge anyone here or be harsh on ourselves. At this stage in the evolution of the human race, this seems to be how things are for many people.

But one of the keys to 'eco-fitness' is re-learning to LIVE IN YOUR BODY.

It's a slow process making friends with your muscles and tuning into body sensations. It will probably take you a few months to get in to the swing of things – just like getting to know any new friend.

Appreciation of how your muscles work and how much they want to help you is one of the keys. Let's think about this. Usually as soon as we feel a muscle starting to ache, fatigue or 'burn' we back off. We are lazy. We find ways to make life easier. Why should we walk to the shop when we've run out of stamps when we can jump in

the car? Our inner language says, 'I'll do it tomorrow, I can't find my shoes, I'm much too tired!'

But wait a moment. Appreciation of our useful, wonderful bodies might make us think differently. 'I'll just pop down to the shop,' we could think instead. 'I could do with a good stretch. I love the feeling of my leg muscles powering along and getting warm. I'm so lucky to have this body that can transport me and carry things. On the way I may smile at someone and make them happy. I'll burn a few calories and that will make me feel good about myself today. Yes, I'm a bit tired, but not exhausted and I know from experience, I'll feel better when I get back. If I walk tall and engage my tummy muscles I will help my bad back to heal and bring my pot belly into line.....' I could carry on.

Other examples – should I vacuum the stairs or will it be a pain in the neck I can do without? Should I knock a ball around with the kids this evening or sit them in front of a computer game? Should I walk the dog or watch East Enders? Recognise any of these? **Knowing you will feel muscle fatigue is so off-putting in advance of the activity that we think of a thousand reasons we cannot do something.**

The key is to experience your muscular sensations as a joy and a pleasure – even the key to happiness. Every time you feel that burn, it's important to insert a positive thought! Just reading this idea will start the process.

But to speed it up, think of some things you can say to yourself (right now) describing physical exertion as a joy.



Exercise 1

Let's take a break from reading straight away with Exercise 1. Lucky you. For this you don't need to move a muscle!

Take ten quiet minutes to think about what an amazing machine the human body is. Even if you are unwell, overweight or unhappy with your body shape right now you can do this about some parts of your body.

We have a spongy mass - full of abilities and memories – our brain. Think of how this compares to a brilliant computer capable of the most complex tasks.

We have guts – metre after metre of digestive system taking fuel and nutrients out of our food and separating the waste. Compare that to the motor car taking energy from fuel and expelling waste materials.

Think of your fingers, your mouth, your spine and contemplate what they can achieve for us – painting, tasting, kissing, standing upright to get a better view at a football match.

Are there any other body parts you can appreciate for their genius of design and compare to something that is the pinnacle of human engineering? Close your eyes and let these thoughts happen. Just take ten minutes – this is the beginning of your work out...



I hope you did that exercise and didn't just rush on....

If you cheated, please do it when you can. These early exercises are central to learning how to use and appreciate the muscles, tendons, ligaments, bones and energy systems you have been given. Planting the seeds of new thoughts and beliefs, is the

start of replacing old ones. Start to see the good in the functionality of your body. It will help you *get inside your body*. It will focus you on the good stuff. From now on you'll appreciate your muscles every time you use them. And rather than resisting or despising the 'burn' you will be able to love it!

It's also really very nice to begin to appreciate the *potential* of your body even if at the moment there's quite some work to do on your shape or weight. As you read this your heart is beating for you, your eyes are scanning like a camera, your temperature is **being** regulated.

For all of us, one of life's simple truths is that our bodies, our design, our complexity is quite amazing.

And yes, technology is also amazing. Aren't we so clever inventing cars and washing machines and computers? Yes we are. There is however one little catch that we should bear in mind whilst enjoying technology.

When we use the car wash, we are saving time, but not using our muscles.

When we use the washing machine we are liberated from domestic chores to do something better. But we don't wring and scrub or stretch up to the washing line.

When we use the vacuum cleaner we don't squat and stretch to clean our floors.

When we sit at the computer to send an email, we are not walking to the post office to post a letter, or walking a small distance to make a personal visit.

When we watch DVDs or play computer games, we are not entertaining ourselves by playing frisbee in the park or knocking a tennis ball or football around.

Life today surely is a wonder and we are lucky. We can access global information, use labour saving equipment and enjoy bright colourful films. I'd just like us to consider some of the movements we have lost as a result and think about ways we can begin to build them back into our lives – for the sake of our health and fitness and the environment.

These simple, everyday movements will be central to your eco-fitness programme. But that's for another chapter. For now, let's go back to the idea of living in, being in your body – of living *in your skin*.

Until we have achieved this – and grown to value our 'machinery' – part of us will still see exercise and movement as a chore.

We need to get to a point of awareness where exercise and movement equals pleasure, enjoyment and a warm, comfortable, proud feeling. You need to start to own and take pride in your miraculous machine.

Exercise 2

Let's try an experiment. Switch off the phone and make sure you won't be disturbed just for ten minutes. Read through this second exercise first then try it out.

All you have to do is to think like a baby! In a moment I want you to close your eyes, breathe deeply and allow yourself a few minutes of your busy life to contemplate. I want you to *forget all you have ever known before*. Close your eyes and imagine how it would be to forget taste, forget memories, forget any associations, forget smell, forget sound. If a thought comes let it go naturally and ignore it. Let your mind go blank.

I know this may be unusual and difficult, but do it to the best of your ability without being critical or judgemental of how well you are doing.

When you open your eyes, pretend you've never seen windows before, or a computer, or a cat. You don't recognise any sounds from outside. Look around with the clear eyes of a baby or an extra-terrestrial seeing the planet **for the first time**. This world is a new and exciting place for you.

Then look down at your hands and wiggle your fingers. Look at your arms, the way they stretch out like levers – keep looking with the innocent, neutral eyes of an alien visitor or a baby. Aren't those hands and fingers amazing creations? Imagine what they can achieve – engraving, writing, oil painting, massaging, stroking a baby to sleep, performing complex heart surgery. Lifting, carrying, inventing, fixing, building, sculpting.....

Take a few moments to look at your hands and arms with the eyes of an extra terrestrial visitor, blocking out our everyday human thoughts. What are they for? How useful are they? What occurs to you when you are in this imaginary, playful state of awareness?

When you are ready, slowly stand up, shake your arms and legs and look around with your usual sense of self – listening out for car sounds, children, animals, the TV or radio, look out of the window at sights you recognise. Ask yourself the time and date. Your friend's birthday. And who is the Prime Minister? This will ground you and restore your usual awareness.

Welcome back – take a few moments, maybe get a cup of tea or a glass of water. Did you have an emotional reaction at all to this way of looking at a part of your body? Did you have a strong emotional reaction? Did you experience any sense of wonder? Did you begin to appreciate what clever contraptions you own?

You are starting to inhabit and appreciate your body. Well done.

Unless we are committed sports people or very physical workers (e.g. builders, roofers, decorators, farmers, jockeys) we have little concept these days of really **NEEDING** our bodies. Even as recently as 50 years ago – and certainly during earlier evolutionary stages of humankind – you truly valued and needed a strong, fit body for every day living.

Some examples? If we go back as far as very early civilisation it's obvious. We needed to track and chase animals, climb trees to gather honey and nuts, hunt with spears, butcher their sometimes enormous bodies and hides, build huts, chop trees by hand, build fires, carry pails of water, sculpt bowls, dig pits, grow and harvest crops. We walked everywhere – or ran, danced vigorously, fought regularly with all our might, stretched to reach for precious nuts and fruit and climbed trees using our arms and legs.

Even in the memory of our parents and grandparents, we'd have to be easily able to maybe ride or drive a horse, carry sacks of coal, dig and maintain a garden, wash and scrub clothes by hand, walk to work or school, climb stairs, squat or kneel to clean floors, carry water from the well, carry goods from the market, chop logs and kindling for the fire.

Today the body is seen more like an ornament - bombarded by advertising with its perfect standards to live up to. That's quite a culture shock!

Blessed with liberating technology, we have become freer than ever to travel, discover, enjoy ourselves, learn. But appreciating how our bodies need to be strong to keep us alive is just not in the equation any more. We have central heating, supermarkets, cars and microwaves for that now.

So part of the process of starting your eco-fitness programme is simple awareness based on how things need to be at this point in history. Humans may have fast food and technology but they still have bodies based on the same biology as a few hundred generations ago!

Obvious but important.

It used to be the case that the body was our home and our means of survival... in previous times we simply had to use it or lose it.

You need to re-establish this old fashioned notion of *use it or lose it* from now on.

And that's because it looks like the modern world has taken away our need to keep fit and strong to survive... but in fact nothing can take away that essential truth.

We are overweight, unhappy with ourselves, suffering from high blood pressure, unable to squeeze into our clothes, worried about our health now or in old age, experiencing unheard of rates of heart disease and obesity in adults and children.

We feel lethargic, we rely on complex carbohydrates giving us mood swings and energy spikes, we feel out of sorts. Maybe we cannot find the energy to play with our children, we are irritable with them, we don't understand where they get all that energy from.

Maybe we have a virtually constant back ache from carrying around that extra flab on our bellies. Our spines have started changing shape to cope with carrying the weight and we get headaches and neck, hip and shoulder pain.

In reality we don't rely on our body's agility for life and death any more, but slowly, over time, letting that machine fall into disuse is catching up with us. Our cells simply cannot evolve quickly enough to cope with our sedentary new technological lives.

Over the course of the next few months, try to think every day about why human beings have a body, how brilliantly designed it is, and what it is designed to be used for. If you like, think of it as your favourite car. Would you leave that in a locked-up garage? Would you pump in the wrong fuel? Would you leave it unused for months to stagnate and rust? Would you let its tyres go down?

Would you buy a splendid racehorse from a top breeder and then tie it up in a barn, feed it the wrong food, watch it get ill?

Your body is more amazing than the best racehorse or the most incredible sports car. It houses your mind, your feelings and your soul. It is capable of communicating, running, thinking, remembering, building, loving, birthing, writing, creating, praying. Now, horses and sports cars are beautiful, but they can't do all that.

Give your body a chance to be what it can be. Don't rush things. Don't go on a crash diet. Don't dash out to buy an expensive gym membership. Let's work together slowly to build health and fitness into your life in a way that is natural and achievable.

Psychologists have observed how we all have in our minds a voice that acts as and sounds like a 'nurturing parent' and a voice that acts as and sounds like a 'critical parent'. These ways of thinking and behaving are formed during childhood.

Many of us have a critical inner voice which nags criticises and puts us down. You can almost imagine it's strict face and wagging finger when it nags at you. Let's not allow this critical parent to beat us up any more. You weren't born with it. Chances are it came from a parent, carer, teacher or another authority figure and you 'swallowed it whole'.

Call upon the nurturing parent element of your personality instead to re-parent your body. Be acknowledging, encouraging and patient with yourself, just as a kind loving mother would be. Think of your body as a beloved child. It's been crying out for love and care for a long time hasn't it?

Treat your body as a respected guest, as a good friend or as a beloved child, instead of an irritating pest, and watch how it calms down and rewards you in return.

Now you've reached the end of the first chapter but I need you to make yourself a promise. If you didn't do those first two exercises, go back and do them now – or later when you have peace and privacy. If you carried out the experiments half heartedly, go back and do them again when you have time - with sincerity. Creating new thoughts about yourself can really help you begin your new eco-fitness programme.



For eco-fitness we need to nurture a new way of *feeling* things. A new way of relating to yourself and to exercise and movement. Even if you're not friends with your body at the moment, just start to appreciate a little of what it achieves for you – breathing, digesting, moving, carrying your brain, walking, storing memories of special events, viewing beautiful scenery.

If we had to make a machine or robot to carry out these tasks, it would be an impossible feat of engineering. So even if you are overweight, or unhappy with yourself, start to appreciate what your body might **soon** be capable of. What it was actually designed for. And start enjoying the gift that you have been given and its potential.

Each meditation on this subject will create new, logical, upbeat attitudes to replace the outdated ones we've all been guilty of harbouring. Eco-fitness equals self awareness. You've made a great new start!

Read on....

Chapter 2 is packed with tips on how, by changing the way you sit, stand and walk, you can burn calories, improve posture, increase your energy levels and improve your body shape..... (no gym membership necessary!)