

Secret, Fun Exercises



By Valerie Baadh Garrett

Stretch In Bed. This most basic full-body yawn is the best exercise you can do before you get up in the morning (or even at night). Babies and animals do it naturally and so should we. Just flex and stretch this way and that, slowly and lightly at first. Reach in front of yourself, over your head. Fold your knees over your chest and curl up, then stretch your heels away from your fingertips.

Go to Hawaii.

Drain tension and improve posture that's cramped

Relax Your Jaw. Many of us carry tension in our throat, neck and jaw that can cause headaches, dental and health problems and wrinkles. Finding a neutral posture for your tongue is a surprisingly effective release for your jaw and throat. Place the top of your tongue lightly up against the roof of your mouth, with the tip of your tongue touching the back of your upper teeth. As you relax into this posture you will notice an immediate release of your jaw tension.

Respect Your Feet. Keep your pups quiet and happy with daily attention of movement, imagery and grooming. My friend, the dancer/choreographer Sybil Shearer (who died at the youthful age of 95!) had a daily practice of circling every bone in her body, slowly, this way and that. While sitting or standing, extend your leg and very slowly and lightly, circle your foot around your ankle a few times. Change feet, repeat and reverse. Make space between the bones with your fingers and then quietly stand.

As a young dancer training in ballet and modern dance, I didn't think much about longevity. My body was my musical instrument. I figured if I got it polished and kept it tuned, it would last me a good long time. Now, at 60, I'm still a performer, dancing with Mountain View's Academy of Danse Libre, the nation's leading vintage ballroom dance company and doing a dozen shows a year – some in high heels!

As a movement coach and educator working with the mind-body connection, I study and teach movement to everyone from little children to the fragile elderly. Along the way, I've learned some very unique longevity secrets that have helped me and many others to feel great, avoid injuries, relieve pain and stay active.

from too much desk or couch time with a free Hawaiian holiday via dynamic imagery. Sit or stand comfortably with bare feet on the ground. Close your eyes and imagine warm sand beneath your feet. Wiggle your toes, heels and arches in the delicious warmth. Take a deep breath and notice that right behind you is a warm waterfall, splashing softly on your shoulders and down your back. Nestle into that water flow and allow your shoulders to drop into the streaming flow of the water.

Dance Every day. Music and movement harmonize the energy fields of the body. So turn up the music and just move. You don't even need a partner. You'll release those feel-good endorphins, your body will wake up in a new way and you'll have renewed energy as well as a boost to your fitness program. If you can't dance, who's to know? Run with music, walk with music, sing or hum along.

For more information on the ideas and programs mentioned, please visit: www.agileaging.org and www.sfmovement.com