



GET WELL

Being healthy is about more than fitting into your favorite bikini. This summer, focus less on dropping the pounds and more on loving yourself—mind, body and soul.

Over the last decade, the burgeoning popularity of yoga, Pilates and even acupuncture has brought the world of alternative wellness and integrative medicine solidly into the mainstream. Still, there's so much left to discover. Here, we explore Chicago's myriad approaches to comprehensive health and wellness.

Meditation

Meditation is a nebulous concept, and not without reason. Rooted in a diverse range of cultures, teachings and traditions, the practice invites countless approaches and takes on many forms. Heck, for some, even gardening can be a way to meditate.

Despite its limitless guises, meditation as a whole does have common strategies and goals. In the words of Amona Buechler, founder of local meditation center **INNER METAMORPHOSIS UNIVERSITY** (1418 W. Howard St., 773.262.1468, lifesurfing.org), meditation strives to provide “a feeling of balance and a place of silence and stillness.” By meditating, “we learn to deliberately step outside of the things that happen every day,” she says. “We take time to pay attention to ourselves and create awareness of ourselves. We allow a time of *just being*.”

The concept of “just being” is a tough one for many of us to grasp, thanks to near-constant streams of mental chatter. Indeed, it’s important to note that the goal of meditation is not to *think*, but rather to acknowledge and become aware. **KENNY MAZURSKY** (kennymazursky.com), a sound therapist who also teaches meditation, likens the process to the following scenario:

Imagine you’re a teacher in a room of small children, all with their hands raised, all straining for your attention. One wants to tell you that her favorite color is green; one wants to tattle on the kid who stole his pencil. Meditation is the process of calling on each child and allowing him or her to say his or her piece—but not to engage, judge or solve. The key is merely to acknowledge.

According to Buechler, meditation does more than provide mental rest or relieve anxiety

(although it can do that). It can be life-changing. “By becoming aware of ourselves, we begin to take responsibility for our own actions,” she says. “Many of us go through these moods or feelings and attribute them to some outside event. By meditating, this perspective is turned around: You see what is inside yourself that might cause these thoughts and feelings.”

She continues, “Even if you are in a fight, and from an outside perspective, the other person is totally wrong, you ask, ‘What does this have to do with me?’ You come to know that if you have clarity within yourself, no outside imbalance can affect you.”

IMU’s approach, of course, is one of many. In contrast to Buddhist tradition, for example, IMU has little to no basis in morality. This can be challenging; for many, a set of values can make meditation easier to grasp. No approach is right or wrong, and the only way to find one that works for you is to sample a variety of styles.

So what, exactly, does one do in a meditation class? A daily session may be one to one-and-one-half hours long, and, generally speaking, meditation begins with focusing on your breath; breathing exercises are a common way to begin achieving that sense of stillness. Some classes at IMU also incorporate movement and dance as ways to release the stresses and anxieties that build up throughout a day. “Movement can really bring out a feeling of joy,” Buechler says.

While anyone can meditate anywhere—your living room can be as good a place as any—a teacher can help to occasionally reel you in: “Are you still present? Have you been pulled away by thought?”

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CHICAGO MEDITATION CENTERS

The best way to find out which type of meditation works for you is by trying a few and paying attention to how each practice makes you feel. Below, find a few of Chicago’s spiritual centers.

INNER METAMORPHOSIS UNIVERSITY
1418 W. Howard St.
773.262.1468
lifesurfing.org

SHAMBHALA MEDITATION CENTER OF CHICAGO
7331 N. Sheridan Rd.
773.743.8147
chicago.shambhala.org

SIDDHA YOGA MEDITATION CENTER OF CHICAGO
770 N. Halsted St., Suite 106
312.738.2798
siddhayogachicago.org

THE PEACE SCHOOL
3121 N. Lincoln Ave.
773.248.7959
peaceschool.org