

Healthy-Steps

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Healthy-Steps, The Lebed Method, is a joyful, life-affirming therapeutic exercise program set to music and rooted in the healing elements of dance. It emphasizes positive energy, mutual support and empowerment. It has been proven by several studies that this program can support both physical and emotional wellness among participants. Healthy-Steps has the potential to improve range of motion, balance, strength and endurance. It is especially helpful for survivors of breast cancer and other cancers, as well as those experiencing lymphedema, arthritis, chronic fatigue syndrome, frozen shoulder and other chronic conditions.

A spirit of playfulness encourages the participants to freely express themselves, often bringing out elements of their "inner child."

"I always leave happy and feeling good every time," reports Joan, who has been a member for five years. The camaraderie experienced by the participants contributes to an atmosphere of fun and celebration.

Vivien, a more recent member, told the group, "I walked into Healthy-Steps a stranger and walked out with friends. We shake and shimmy, stretch and sway to the best music ever."

Trish, who joined the program last year, states, "Not just an exercise class. I cannot say enough about the supportive nature of the group. It is a stress-free atmosphere; everyone does the movements that they are comfortable doing . . . no worries, just fun, you don't have to be perfect."

Nancy, a former teacher, says "We get to do something for ourselves, kind of like recess for kids. It's me-time."

Structure of the session

Every session begins with a prescribed warm-up designed to promote stretching and opening of the lymphatic system.

This is followed by core exercises including upper body movements with resist-a-bands. Imagery is used to encourage an increase in range of motion (for example, reaching into the refrigerator to get the chocolate we've hidden or lifting a tray of fruit over our heads.) Images are playful, sometimes sensuous, and often evoke laughter or comments. Lower body movements such as side-to-side hip swings, walking and balance exercises are interspersed to increase energy flow through the entire body. Each session includes a simple dance with a combination of familiar movements that are repeated to music. Props, such as feather boas, inflatable balls, and even paper plates are used to enhance the experience of dancing and playing. There are one or two water breaks, during which there is casual conversation. A seated "cool-down" ends the session using gentle, meditative movements, focused breathing and soothing music. This is followed by an open discussion, which could include questions, reactions, sharing of information about treatment, family or community events.

Although there have been a few men in the program over the years, Healthy-Steps tends to attract mostly women, who enjoy the freedom to discuss women's health issues and get feedback from other women.

A major benefit is interacting with women who have similar issues, says Donna, a breast cancer survivor who has been a dedicated member for two years. "We learn new things from one another about coping with our problems."

Healthy-Steps is a gentle, total body program; therefore, many people discover they can do it even when they are unable to engage in more rigorous types of exercise. Phyllis succinctly summed up this feature: "I like the dancing and it's do-able!"

