

# INSPIRATION

H A W A I I ' S W E L L N E S S J O U R N A L

A JOURNAL  
FOR THE  
MIND, BODY  
AND SPIRIT

Inspiration Kaua'i  
Wellness Expo  
2010  
Presents  
Dr. and Master  
Zhi Gang Sha  
Inner Peace,  
Universal Peace

A look at the  
Swine Flu with Dr.  
Ken Pierce, DO, MS

Walking for Health  
Nordic style with  
Terri Hunter

Mana Yoga  
examines - Is Your  
Yoga harmful?



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November / December 2009

PUBLISHER'S PAGE.....	8	NORDIC WALKING 101 .....	13
INNER PEACE, UNIVERSAL PEACE .....	10	Terri Hunter	
Dr. Zhi Gang Sha		IS YOUR YOGA DOING MORE	
HOW HIGH IS YOUR SWINE FLU I.Q.? .....	12	HARM THAN GOOD? .....	14
Ken Pierce, DO, MS		Michelle Edwards	
MANTRAS FOR SOUL EVOLUTION.....	12	RESOURCE DIRECTORY & MARKETPLACE .....	15
Anandra George		WELLNESS PRODUCTS & SERVICES .....	18

Our Philosophy: *Inspiration* is a reflection of the collective communities of Hawaii, the mainland and the world. It is a vehicle for holistic healers, for health, natural living, social and environmental professionals throughout Hawaii, to share their knowledge. We believe in cultivating an understanding of the body, mind and spirit in an effort to encourage the exploration of inner peace, harmony and balance.

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# Is Your Yoga Doing More Harm Than Good?

By Michelle Edwards



**photo 1**  
A Flattened or Convex Sacrum  
This creates tension in the lower back.



**photo 2**  
The Spine Aligner.  
Bent knees support the four natural curves of the spine.

## Alignment Begins with Freeing the Breathing Process

Poses in yoga should be consistent with good posture and alignment. Alignment is dictated by our breathing and our fascia. Shallow breathing creates poor posture. Deep centered breathing aligns you in a natural position. The YogAlign™ Method, developed on the North Shore of Kaua`i, was designed to teach functional breathing skills, for yoga practice and for functional living.

## Simple Movements Can Restrict Breathing

*Get a drinking straw for this exercise and put it in your mouth. Stand with your feet naturally hip-width apart, your knees slightly bent. Get your trunk aligned with the lower part of your body: press your feet into the floor while holding your hands by your shoulders with your fingers spread and elbows bent. Hold this alignment and let your arms drop along your sides naturally. Inhale sipping on the straw, noticing how much your ribs can move. Breathe through the straw several times, noticing how your breathing process feels.*

*Now stand with the feet close together. Again try to sip on the straw and notice how the breathing muscles are restricted.*

Because the feet are now close together, muscles have contracted via connective tissue lines all the way from your feet to your breathing process and are inhibiting inhalation. Standing with the feet together is not natural or functional and therefore not a beneficial way to engage the body for better posture or for yoga.

## Our Fascia Web Holds Us Up

Linear ideas about shape and anatomy sometimes confuse us about what really supports us. We have a web of connective tissue, or fascia, that permeates our entire structure. It's everywhere, making up 20% of our body weight, lining every cell, organ, and tissue. Some may think that bones hold us up, but the classroom skeleton is artificially wired together. The body could not stand freely without connective tissue attaching to and supporting the skeleton. We need equal pull in the tensile structures of our body to move freely. To balance movement in the body, you must balance fascia lines.

## Why Are We Doing These Poses?

Foremost among reasons people practice yoga is a desire to connect with their body and mind. We practice yoga poses to build strength and flexibility, and to seek contemplation and meditation. No one that I know of is practicing yoga to injure themselves. Yet it is happening far too often. According to statistics, yoga injuries are rising and some physical

therapists have estimated that 30 to 40% of people doing yoga get some type of injury. According to the Consumer Products Safety Commission, 13,000 people went to the emergency room between 2004 and 2007 reporting yoga injuries. The YogAlign™ Method was developed in part to combat this rise in yoga injuries and to encourage people to use yoga to get functional, not put themselves into poses that can do more harm than good. I suffered injuries in my own practice before adapting the YogAlign™ Method. It teaches you the art of listening to your body. Many hear the body when it is screaming in pain, yet few hear the whispering and clues about alignment and being at ease. When you do a pose, listen to your body. Ask questions. Can I take a full deep breath? Does this pose have anything to do with how my body moves naturally? This dialogue empowers you with discernment and a deep sense of feeling the body.

Many admit that they dislike the straight-leg seated positions, but feel that their body isn't flexible enough. Not liking these poses means that you are communicating well with your body. It feels bad because it compresses the lower back and pulls on the sacrum. Continuing to do harm to the body when it has sent a clear message to stop is a violation of the fundamental yama ahimsa, or non-violence tenet. Practice ahimsa towards others and yourself.

People who are very flexible in the hips and hamstrings do these exercises with ease, not realizing the danger of flattening the lumbar spinal curve and over-stretching sacral ligaments. The straight, flat spinal line at the pelvis of a "saggy sacrum" leads to hip compression and knee pain and a lack of shock absorption for the entire body structure. There is a very good chance such positions will not improve your flexibility and, done over an extended period, could cause harm.

Do you ever walk with both knees straightened at the same time? The body is designed to move by bending the knees, so we need to let go of the old, outdated idea that "straightening your knees and trying to bend forward" will make you flexible - or shows how flexible you are. The straight-leg, flexed foot, right-angled positioning has permeated fitness training and culture far too long.

Three simple tests determine whether a pose serves the human design:

1. It should allow the spine to have its natural curves
2. It should not restrict the ability to do deep, full, rib cage breathing
3. It should have a real life correlation to functional movement positions

Excerpted from M. Z. Edwards' new book due out this fall - Painfree Yoga from your inner core. For more information visit: [www.manayoga.com](http://www.manayoga.com) or email: [manayoga@yahoo.com](mailto:manayoga@yahoo.com)