

Neuroplasticity and The Fountain of Youth

By Denise Medved

Some of you participated in the Ageless Grace certification with me at OurNiaSpace this past two weeks, and know I have spent over 8 years studying neuroplasticity and what that means to actively aging. Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain and central nervous system to change its form and structure over the course of a lifetime — stimulated by practicing physical activities that the brain then processes in order to gain proficiency.

"Playing" as we do in Nia class, re-opens the neural pathways you created from the time you were born until you were approximately 21 years old (when you played "games" to gain skills, coordination and maximum functionality). You also want to create NEW neural pathways. This is done by practicing physical skills that you currently do NOT know how to do...just as you did as a child and youth. For example, we might attempt to draw in the air a circle with the right hand, a triangle with the left foot and a line with the left hand, simultaneously...and then reverse the process and mirror it on the opposite side of the body.

Another beneficial practice is to shake individual body parts, combine two or three at once and then integrate as many body parts as possible. True shaking (which causes the voice to vibrate when you sound at the same time), moves the myofascia or connective tissue which networks throughout the body. Additionally it increases the production of the hormone, collagen — the youth hormone — and lessens the production of the hormone cortisol — the stress hormone. Shaking stimulates the nervous system — and after 2-3 minutes of continued shaking, it allows total relaxation in the muscles.

it only takes a short amount of "practice" each day (10-15 minutes) to stimulate the neurotransmitters in the brain and allow your body to "recall" it's previous skill level, as well as to learn new functional skills (similar to remembering how to ride a bicycle after many years of non-practice). However, the benefit of movement practice is cumulative, so you need to incorporate playful movement into your daily schedule for short amounts of time, in addition to your weekly Nia classes. This development of neuroplasticity is being called "the key to the fountain of youth" by many scientists and researchers. Happy aging!