

The Seasonal Approach to Health *Core Strength As It Relates To Late Summer* *by Kathy Mark*

Late summer is the season correlated to the element Earth. It is a transitional time. Late summer is an important time to stay centered or grounded, so as not to go into total chaos. This is the time before fall when everyone is preparing for school or the holidays and getting ready for the activities of the Fall and Winter Seasons. Late summer is a time of richness in nature, a time to harvest and make new plans. The Earth is our support, our base, our core - where we stand and lay. Being earthy or grounded might mean we have a solid base or are very centered and strong in our core.

The spleen and stomach are the body organs connected with the Earth element. In Chinese medicine, the spleen is a central organ both anatomically as well as physiologically. Defects in the energy of the spleen can affect the whole body. The stomach is the receiver of nourishment. If the stomach is not working properly we may become weak or malnourished. In Chinese medicine centering is a much broader concept than core strength of the abdominals, pelvic floor and spine, which are typically focused on in core building classes such as Pilates. Centering involves the balance between heaven and earth, between right and left and between our inner and outer worlds. It is a place of awareness for relaxation and balance. Exercise focusing on core strength, breath and mobility can assist in finding a fuller sense of centering and balance for the body and the mind as it relates to the late Summer Season.

To assist in keeping the body and mind centered and strong in the core, as well as helping the stomach distribute nourishment through the body, an exercise program, which includes sweating, can help with the process. Late Summer is also a time Nature turns to an inward cycle, and in some areas of the country, the body must adjust to a lower temperature and perhaps more fluctuating temperatures. This is a time you may find yourself contracting and needing to loosen up your joints by stretching. Flexibility, endurance, and strength are all a part of being centered, strong and balanced. A well balanced fitness program, including core strength such as Pilates based movements is perfect for strength, flexibility, stability and body awareness.

The following exercises are recommended for this Late Summer Season:

- **Walk to Fast Walk or Jogging:** To get the heart pumping and blood flowing – to overcome inertia and to warm the joints before stretching and working the core - and to assist in moving nourishment through the body. Remember to monitor your heart rate.

- **Pilates Obliques/Stomach Crunches:** These will help tone the digestive organs and the abdominal muscles and pelvic floor.
 - Breathe fully- in through the nose, out through the mouth – deep into your lower back and sides.
 - Using abdominals and pelvic floor (kegal) press lower back into the floor, lift both legs up with knees bent into chest, scoop up and hold back of head with hands, elbows nice and wide.
 - Draw one knee in and rotate torso, leading with the opposite shoulder (elbows wide) and then switch (bicycle legs).



- **Swimming/Superman:** This exercise will help strengthen the back muscles, glutes, rear deltoid muscles and balances the body from the previous exercise.
 - Breathe fully- in through the nose, out through the mouth – deep into your lower back and sides.
 - Lie on your stomach (prone) with your legs hip distance, toes pointed and turned out at the hips. Reach your arms long by your ears. Allow the nose to lightly touch the the mat/floor keeping your neck neutral.
 - Firm your abdominals, glutes and pelvic floor (just enough to stabilize) and lift one arm and the opposite leg, alternate and move at a speed that you can maintain stability and control.



- **Teaser/Pike Pose:** This exercise is a little more difficult to perform. This develops core strength, balance and self control.

Start lying on your back, knees bent, arms reaching long by your ears.

On your first breath - firm your abdominals so the lower back moves into the floor and sweep your arms forward and up – sit just behind your sit bones, then peel back down vertebra by vertebra.

To make the move harder – start in the same position, but with the legs lifted off of the floor – as in the picture. If you keep the knees slightly bent – it may easier. Peel back down vertebra by vertebra. Complete only enough repetitions so that you continue to feel stable.



- **Rocking/Bow Pose**: This exercise will balance the body and mind from the previous exercise by moving the spine and energy in the opposite direction:

Start lying on your stomach. Carefully bend the knees and reach back to find the feet or ankles with the hands. If you have very tight quadriceps, shoulders or back this may be difficult to do and you may have to work up to this position. For some knees and backs it may not be appropriate.

On your first breath – press your pelvis into the floor (firming the glutes and abdominals) and curve up - then exhale and lower down. When you curve up imagine reaching your feet to the ceiling. Repeat.



- **A Child's Pose** is appropriate after this exercise to rebalance the spine and to recenter your mind and calm the breath.



There are many other core exercises that can be done. Just remember to bring balance into your exercise routine. When you are balanced and strong you can accomplish anything you set your mind to!

Kathy Mark is a Fully Certified Stott Pilates Instructor, Certified Personal Trainer and Certified Yoga For Golfer's Instructor. For additional information or to schedule an appointment, you may stop by or call the Spa reservations desk at 480-595-3500