

the Gyrotonic® and Gyrokinesis® system: a primer

Catch the wave as interest in this creative exercise method gathers momentum.

Juliu Horvath, creator and founder of the Gyrotonic Expansion System® and Gyrokinesis, is the epitome of a modern-day man for all seasons. An intuitive teacher, a former professional ballet dancer, a yogi and a wood sculptor, this 63-year-old Hungarian has developed a unique system of movement that gently works the joints and muscles of the body through rhythmic, undulating motions that embrace key principles also found in swimming, dance, yoga, tai chi and gymnastics. “The octopus, the monkey and the cat are my basic models because they can move in any direction at any given time with strength and control because they have no restrictions. The human body has restrictions, but I can model the body—within the framework of its restrictions—to move in a similar way, to be free,” he says.

Designed to take the body “beyond its current limitations,” Gyrotonic training stretches, strengthens and elongates muscles, stimulating connective tissue in and around the joints and improving balance, coordination, strength and flexibility. Horvath believes that exercise should be a creative and playful experience: “I want music in my body and poetry in my body, and I want to be skillful without struggle; it has to come without struggle.”

His system has two components: the Gyrokinesis program, originally called “Yoga for Dancers,” which works the entire body without equipment by stimulating internal organs through fluid and gentle manipulation of multiple joints; and Gyrotonic training, which uses apparatus that permits the person to move with support and resistance. Both forms of exercise allow the body to work in continuous, flowing movements and are synchronized with corresponding breathing patterns. Advocates of the work say it

enhances aerobic and cardiovascular stimulation and promotes neuromuscular rejuvenation.

About the Founder

Born and raised in Romania, Horvath—who glides with the grace of a cheetah and speaks in heavily accented English—explained during an hour-long interview with *IDEA Fitness Journal* that the Juliu Horvath Method™, as it once was called, was developed after his personal struggle with chronic pain and injury. After dancing principal roles with the Romanian State Opera Ballet in his 20s, he defected in 1970 while on tour in Italy and after 6 months in a refugee camp was granted political asylum by the United States. Horvath then moved to New York City, was hired by the prestigious New York City Opera and toured with ballet icons Margot Fonteyn and Jacques d’Amboise. Eventually his journey took him to Texas, where he became principal dancer with the Houston Ballet, but his dance career ended when he ruptured his Achilles tendon and damaged several disks in his back.

Horvath retreated to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands to recover and regroup, and there he began an extensive study and practice of yoga. It was out of this experience and his personal research that the Gyrokinesis methodology first developed. “I discovered Kundalini energy through my pain and agony, and somehow that awakened me. Being awakened energetically means that you can read the movement when it is not a movement yet. You are like a little child who is totally unconscious and not prepared to make movement happen. Children move because something moves them from within.”

Horvath returned to New York in the early 1980s and began teaching his new method of exercise at Steps on Broadway, a well-known professional dance studio, and in Central Park. With a zealous following, he opened his first studio, White Cloud®, in 1984 and set about designing and building his first Gyrotonic equipment.

Circles and Spirals

The Gyrokinesis program, which forms the core of Horvath’s methodology, works the entire body through seven natural elements of spinal motion: forward, backward, left side, right side, left twist, right twist and circular. Horvath describes the movement as fluid, continuous and harmonious: “It goes out, and then it comes back. It is like dropping a pebble in the middle of a lake; the wave starts spreading and then comes back.” Gyrokinesis exercises are performed on a 16- or 20-inch stool.

According to Matt Aversa, vice president and chief operating officer of Gyrotonic International in Pennsylvania, when “Juliu built his wonderful equipment, . . . the exercises were already there. The dilemma, which he resolved, was to build equipment that would allow one to continue to perform these movements.”

Aversa elaborates: “Gyrotonic movements consist of guiding the body through a series of circles and spirals. It helps us create a musculature that is strong but that also has the dexterity to allow the bones to do what they are meant to do. Furthermore, it allows the body to keep moving, without interruption, because of the circularity of the movements and the design of the equipment itself. There is no endpoint to Gyrotonic exercises.”

After more than 20 years, the Gyrotonic apparatus has evolved considerably. The basic piece of equipment, the pulley tower combination, is an elegant, curvy sculpted unit made of wood, leather and various pulleys and weights. It increases spinal articulation, eliciting a spherical and three-dimensional awareness in the body.

There are four additional specialized units:

- The GYROTONER®, which duplicates the movements of the human body in multiple planes, is beneficial for shoulder, elbow and wrist rehabilitation. It has handle and foot units that operate either separately or together.

- The jumping-stretching board, a versatile apparatus that stretches and strengthens the torso, is especially useful for lateral movement of the lower limbs.
- The ladder unit is designed to increase proprioceptive understanding and enable optimum stretching.
- The leg extension unit, used for the lower body, is considered effective for knee, foot and ankle therapy.

All the equipment is designed to provide joint articulation without compression, the goal being to distribute the work evenly between agonist and antagonist muscle groups. The apparatus accommodates all body types and strength levels. It is currently being used in therapeutic, dance, sport-specific and general conditioning facilities, in addition to Gyrotonic exercise studios.

Instructor Training

Gyrotonic education in the United States is based in Miami Beach, Florida, where Horvath does his teacher training and certification. According to master trainer Kathy Van Patten, founder and owner of Bodyworks Studio in Boston, "Not only does Juliu personally certify each current instructor, but he has trademarked his work in almost every country in the world; and although he revises and extends his work, the practice of Gyrotonic is very consistent all over the world."

Debra Rose of San Francisco Gyrotonic has worked with Horvath since the mid 1980s. She says, "Certified Gyrotonic trainers have all worked directly with Juliu, and his underlying principles are like a rock." As an example, Rose describes how the breath is used in the exercise system: "There are a number of different ways to use the breath. If you have a slow exercise like the Arch and Curl, you do a longer, more sustained, fuller breath; and if you're doing a more percussive movement like the Twist and Pull, then you use a more percussive breath. The way Juliu interlaces the breath . . . facilitates the movement; it is so organic."

In Europe, Gyrotonic education is headquartered in Bad Krozingen, Germany, at the Reintalklinik, where Horvath spends 6 months each year. Apart from offering teacher-training and certification programs, the clinic has a Gyrotonic Room specializing in joint rehabilitation, especially for knees, hips and spines. This

room is run by Horvath's brother, Paul, a physical therapist.

Master trainer Stephanie Spencer, owner of Pacific Movement Center in Santa Cruz, California, did her teacher training in Germany. "I wanted to see the rehabilitative aspects of the Gyrotonic method, and you definitely see this at the clinic. The scope of the work is all-inclusive, from people with physical problems to the dancer, the athlete or just the average person. There are modifications, but it is basically the same system for all bodies, which makes it so unique and brilliant. Everyone can get something out of it."

Christine Wilson, a master trainer at Infinite Dynamics in San Luis Obispo, California, and a registered nurse who works with orthopedic surgeons, chiropractors and physical therapists, says, "Gyrotonic principles can be applied by trainers who have had medical training or those who have not; Juliu has made the system so safe that if you apply it correctly, the way it is taught, the client will get great benefit out of it. My medical background gives me the security to know that the system really works."

Currently there are 873 licensed Gyrotonic studios worldwide, with 532 in the United States and 62 master trainers who have undergone years of extensive, specialized training personally supervised by Horvath. These master trainers are permitted to conduct basic teacher training. The advanced training program has been closed temporarily because, as Horvath puts it, "Now everyone wants to be a master trainer because we are a growing community." He says he doesn't want to expand his teacher-training system in such a way as to dilute what he has already accomplished. "I'll let the master trainers ripen, and then in a few years [I'll] return and start again." (For information on teacher training, see the sidebar "Gyrotonic® and Gyrokinesis® Teacher-Training Requirements.")

Gyrotonic Exercise and Pilates

The Gyrotonic Expansion System has been compared and contrasted to Pilates, a whole-body integrative exercise approach that emphasizes core stability, correct body alignment and balance. Horvath is reluctant to make a comparison, but master trainer Van Patten, also a senior teacher trainer for Power Pilates, believes that

Pilates and the Gyrotonic system offer different paths of discovery. "It's best not to 'cherry-pick' Pilates and Gyrotonic exercises and combine them into a single workout. It's worse to try to integrate one with the other, because then you'll be misrepresenting both. They should be taught separately," she says.

Van Patten, whose instructors teach both methods, believes, "It is important to match the exercise to the client. Pilates comes from a more muscular and linear approach, the Gyrotonic system from a more energetic and circular/spherical approach."

Resources

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Worldwide source for Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis products, videotapes, training information, master trainer facilities, teacher-training facilities and trademark usage guidelines. There are three new DVDs available: "Gyrokinesis Level 1, Format 1"; "Gyrokinesis Level 1, Format 2"; and "Gyrokinesis Level 2, Beginner." There are also two videos: "Journey Through the Spine" and "Gyrokinesis Level 1." A book on the Gyrotonic Expansion System® is scheduled for publication next year.

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Gyrotonic® and Gyrokinesis® teacher-training requirements

The following is a brief roadmap of the steps required to become a licensed Gyrotonic and/or Gyrokinesis trainer. Instruction is offered only by a master trainer or a qualified and authorized pretrainer (pretraining courses only). Juliu Horvath must personally certify all apprentices and students. It can take up to 15 months to complete the program from pretraining to final certification.

For more detailed information, including costs, refer to www.gyrotonic.com and click on the certification link.

GYROTONIC EXPANSION SYSTEM®

Pulley Tower Combination Unit: Level 1

- **Introductory Sessions:** Student becomes familiar with the apparatus and the work.
- **Pretraining:** Student learns and practices the work to prepare physically for the foundation course (6-day minimum and 20–28 hours of training).
- **Foundation Teacher-Training Course:** Student is prepared for the Gyrotonic Apprentice Teaching Certificate. The course introduces teaching techniques and principles and is taught by a master trainer (minimum of 12 days and 60 hours of training).
- **Apprenticeship:** Apprentice prepares for the final certification with Juliu Horvath. Apprenticeship refines the skills learned in the foundation course. This stage lasts a minimum of 6 months, including 25 hours of teaching and supervised hours with a master trainer.
- **Final Certification:** This 3-day course is taught only by Juliu Horvath (4–6 hours per day). Every apprentice must take it in order to receive the Gyrotonic Level I certification. The course is offered primarily in Miami Beach, Florida, and in Germany.
- **Continuing Education:** A mandatory update is required every 2 years to keep the trainer's license active as the system evolves. Taught by a master trainer.

Pulley Tower Combination Unit: Level 2 (6 days)

- **Prerequisite:** Trainer has been certified as a Level I Gyrotonic trainer for at least 6 months. Physical fitness and stamina are recommended.
- **Foundation Teacher-Training Course, Level 2.** This level offers more advanced and athletic exercises requiring greater endurance. The trainer garners a deeper understanding of the work and can then apply it to clients, if warranted.

Training on Specialized Equipment

- **Prerequisite:** Level I Gyrotonic trainer certification.
- **Specialized Courses (all taught by master trainers):**
 1. **GYROTONER®:** 5-day Foundation Teacher-Training Course, minimum of 4 hours per day.
 2. **Jumping-Stretching Board:** 3-day pretraining; 5-day Foundation Teacher-Training Course, minimum of 4 hours per day.
 3. **Ladder Unit:** 3-day Foundation Teacher-Training Course, minimum of 4 hours per day.
 4. **Leg Extension Unit:** 3-day Foundation Teacher-Training Course, minimum of 4 hours per day.

The Wave of the Future

Horvath describes his system as living and evolving and believes that “you cannot always do the same thing exactly the same way.” With this original approach in mind, he is looking to the future, which he passionately believes is to bring children into his Gyrotonic world. “All children do is play with computers and sit all day long; there is not enough physical activity, and it is not the right physical activity.”

To address this issue, which he considers of paramount importance, Hor

vath has designed and personally carved a child's version of the pulley tower in the shape of a playful dragon with functional but whimsical moving parts. He plans to manufacture the piece in Miami Beach, Florida, and will build it for two age groups, 4- to 10-year-olds and 11- to 16-year-olds. Horvath's enthusiasm and dedication to help young people are evident: “The future is in the children; our future is always in who is growing up, and somehow I feel that this [Gyrotonic] work is going to enhance a little part of their life.”

GYROKINESIS

Gyrokinesis: Level 1

- **Introductory Sessions**
- **Pretraining:** Student is prepared physically for the Foundation course. Main focus is on the physical execution of the essential exercises (6 consecutive days or two 3-day segments with 90-minute to 2-hour classes plus a 2-hour session each day to perfect the exercises).
- **Foundation Teacher-Training Course:** Student is introduced to the teaching techniques and principles in the foundation course exercise manual. He/she learns to execute and teach two different class formats and receives an apprentice certificate. Taught by a master trainer (9-day period, minimum of 4 hours per day).
- **Apprenticeship:** Apprentice prepares for the final certification with Juliu Horvath. The trainee must teach 30 Gyrokinesis classes (1 hour each), complete a supervised review workshop with a master trainer, and continue teaching classes to gain experience (minimum of 6 months).
- **Final Certification:** This is taught only by Juliu Horvath (2 days, 4–6 hours per day).
- **Continuing Education:** Mandatory update is required every 2 years.

Gyrokinesis Level 2

- **Prerequisite:** Trainer has been certified as a Level I Gyrokinesis trainer for at least 6 months. Designed for the professional advancement of certified trainers.

Rosalind Gray Davis, an award-winning journalist and media consultant for more than 30 years, is an avid student of the Gyrotonic Expansion System and a certified Pilates instructor. In addition to authoring a recent biography, she has written for a number of major U.S. publications, produced documentaries on a variety of subjects, produced and written broadcast news and discussion programs, and taught college journalism.

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