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FOR MIND
BODY AND
LOVE LIFE

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THE BLONDER
THE BETTER!
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THE CUT AND
LIGHTENING UP

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TURN OF THE CENTURY

Lean machine: Far from confining, the Gyrotonic Expansion System helps the stiff find freedom.

IT MAY LOOK LIKE A MEDIEVAL TORTURE DEVICE, BUT THE GYROTONIC EXPANSION SYSTEM DOESN'T HURT—IT HEALS, TONES, AND MAY EVEN MAKE YOU A BETTER DANCER.

AIDA LEISENRING REPORTS

What happens when a professional ballet dancer ruptures his Achilles tendon and, after his career ends, takes up yoga? He creates a yoga-dance hybrid and builds a machine called the Gyrotonic Expansion System so that the Zenless and rhythmless can learn the art. Never heard that one? Developed in the '80s by Hungarian-born Julio Horvath (said ex-dancer), the Gyrotonic Expansion System may not be new, but its practice has become increasingly popular. In the last three years, the number of studios offering lessons has tripled worldwide. Said to simultaneously stretch and strengthen muscles and increase flexibility and joint mobility, Gyrotonic exercises are helping dancers to enhance their turns, golfers to improve their swings, the injured to rehabilitate, and ordinary women to reshape their bodies, getting stronger and leaner at the same time.

THE BODY BUILDER

The machine is a workout bench that is attached to rotating wheels with handles. It also has scary arm-at-the-ob/gyn leather stirrups connected to weights, varying from 10 to 50 pounds, on a pulley tower. The wheels are for your hands to execute circular washing-your-car movements, while the straps help your limbs make choreographed elliptical motions, like bicycle circles. "Unlike Pilates or any everyday activity, Gyrotonic moves are circular, not linear, so you're using the fullest range of muscles available," says Louisa Laurie, owner of the Manhattan-based YogaMoves Gyrotonic studio. While grabbing the handles and rotating the wheels may look simple, turning one counterclockwise with your left hand, the other clockwise with your right, and arching your back (not to mention incorporating synchronized breathing) is not. Without an instructor twisting your hips, pinching your butt, and poking and pulling you into position, you may feel like a contortionist but might not get the full therapeutic, strengthening, and mind-clearing benefits of Gyrotonic.

While the system offers hundreds of exercises, the advanced can perform an "infinite" amount, according to Laurie. "Dancers can do more

than a person with no martial arts or yoga background, but anyone will get a full workout because they're challenging their body to move in new ways," Laurie says. This might explain why even religious gymgoers didn't lose inches from their bodies until they tried Gyrotonic training. "Although it's not aerobic exercise, it forces you to engage multiple muscle groups simultaneously, whereas standard weight lifting isolates a muscle group and bulks up that area," says Manhattan-based chiropractor Richard Klein, DC, who recommends the regimen to his patients. Believers boast firmer abs, legs, and derriere, as well as better coordination. "It does a lot of combination work on the glutes and lower abs," Klein says.

GET WELL SOON

But the benefits are not just aesthetic—they're also medical. Gyrotonic systems are used in German physical rehabilitation clinics. According to Klein, Gyrotonic can help prevent injuries because it improves balance and stability. "It can benefit those with arthritis," says physiatrist Marc Darrow, MD, assistant clinical professor at the UCLA School of Medicine. "As we age, the collagen in our ligaments and joints wears down. The Gyrotonic system counters that by gently stretching the areas and bringing additional blood and nutritional supply," Darrow says.

Certified Gyrotonic trainers, however, should not be confused with MDs. "Anyone who has an injury should check with a doctor first," Darrow warns. On the other hand, Gyrotonic training—done correctly and with the help of an instructor—is virtually injury-free. "People get so competitive with yoga; they try advanced positions right away. At least with Gyrotonic you receive constant personal attention," Darrow says. And Gyrotonic certificates aren't readily doled out. One must complete 180 hours of training and cough up \$2,500—a fee that pays off, as private one-hour lessons cost from \$50 to \$100 each. Those intimidated by the machinery can play Simon Says at home with the master of circles: Gyrokinesis, an equipment-free workout video, features the guru himself, Horvath, who leads you through similar moves in your living room. □