



# Sharing the Joy

*Nia 5 Stages, the Core of the Body and the Chakras*



*"When left to its own devices, the body will always move towards homeostasis, where healing occurs. It will always choose what feels good as the way to become stronger and healthier."*

Debbie Rosas Stewart

There are many methods for conditioning the core of your body, however the first step is to heal injuries and establish correct alignment. Nia 5 Stages is a practice of retracing the body's developmental process to re-pattern, realign, energize and condition the body, mind, emotions and spirit. Because the chakra system is housed in the core of the body, focusing on the chakras in your Nia 5 Stages practice reveals important information about your core, which allows you to make adjustments for self-healing and energetic balance. Use this handout to support your Nia 5 Stages and FloorPlay practice and soon your pelvis, chest and head will be moving with more freedom and expression—on and off the dance floor—than ever before.

# PART 1: Nia 5 Stages



## A little history

Since the creation of Nia in 1983, I have been inspired by some remarkable people in the field of somatic education. Stanley Keleman, author of *Emotional Anatomy*, is one of those people. In 1989, when I began to develop Nia's FloorPlay program, part of my study included researching Keleman's work and playing with the developmental stages he called "embryonic, creeping, crawling, standing and walking." This inspired me to look at healing, restructuring and re-patterning from a foundational perspective. While Keleman focused on using these stages to investigate emotions, I chose to focus on the physical and energetic benefits they offer. Using the design of my body as my map and sensation – the Voice of the Body – as my guide, I began closely examining the organic process of how we learn to walk. This revealed a path I began using to self-heal my body and ultimately, achieve greater functioning.

What I discovered on this path was a simple and efficient way to naturally realign the body – physically and energetically – that supports our ongoing process of healing and exploring higher levels of conditioning. I found that powerful results for everybody can be achieved in as little as five minutes a day, and no matter how many times people practice, profound changes occur. My findings from years of practice and research led to the development of a program called "Nia 5 Stages," which is today offered as a part of Classic Nia classes, in stand-alone Nia 5 Stages classes, and in-depth Nia 5 Stages trainings.

## The Practice

Nia 5 Stages is a physical practice based on the five stages of human development: *Embryonic, Creeping, Crawling, Standing* and *Walking*. Consciously moving through these stages as an adult re-integrates the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements of a person in such a way that after just five minutes of practice, participants notice improvements in power, range of motion and ease in areas of their bodies other forms of exercise cannot affect. This process of realignment allows the body to do what it is designed to do: explore its potential, self-heal and grow.

## Nia 5 Stages practice results in —

- Increased energy and vitality
- Improved posture and grace
- Heightened Sensory IQ awareness
- Increased flow of energy throughout the body
- Improved ability to live in a state of dynamic ease
- A deep sense of relaxation often associated with meditation
- Integration and alignment of all parts of the body, mind, emotions and spirit

## Nia 5 Stages practice is excellent for —

- Reclaiming optimal alignment and functioning
- Releasing tension and blocked energy
- Regaining flexibility, agility, mobility, strength and stability (FAMSS)
- Reclaiming and maintaining joint mobility and muscle balance
- Preparation for physical activity, rest or meditation
- Establishing a connection between the self (internal) and the external world

## Nia 5 Stages: Described



### Embryonic

The first stage of development, *Embryonic*, is a circular architecture of movement. Embryonic is fishlike, with fluid, gently dynamic movements. Rolling and “cooking” all four sides, you move as if you are in water, suspended and supported to move freely. In this stage, move from your center, your umbilical cord. Everything you need is provided – simply receive and sense *pleasure*. Slip into the pre-verbal state, where you can move without thinking.



### Creeping

The second stage of development, *Creeping*, is a linear, horizontal movement architecture. Creeping is lizard-like, integrating the action of opposite sides. Your body is a long line with a curve in the lower spine, a smooth slope from tail to head. Your shoulders face forward and your hips face down, resting on the earth. One leg is long and extended as the opposite knee draws up, freeing your hip joint to help you move forward. Use one hand to reach out and pull, while the other hand pushes, staying close to your body. The pressure of your hands against the earth keeps your upper chest up, away from and off the floor. In Creeping, sense the extension of your spine as you look out and straight ahead, using your hands and forearms to move forward. Your feet remain “sunny side up” – if you use them at all, it is only to push with your inner arches. In this stage, you begin listening to *your body’s way*, adapting your actions to move with the sensations of pleasure and comfort. If necessary, stop, rest, and then begin again. With practice, as your body learns to release tension and move in its original state, moving in this stage will become easier.



### Crawling

The third stage of development, *Crawling*, is a four-point of contact “tabletop” architecture of movement, a self-sustaining geometry. Crawling is bear-like, shifting postures from four pillars of stability onto three pillars of mobility. As one hand reaches, soft and paw-like, sense the looseness of your hand and wrist joint, fingers dripping down, free of tension. Your belly hangs down with the pull of gravity, creating a curve in your lumbar spine. Here, your spine naturally begins to develop agility, mobility and strength. Look forward and out into the world in front of you – not down at the ground – to develop mobility in your neck and cervical spine. Your feet are still sunny side up as you crawl in your own way, adapting your movement so your neck, shoulder blades and ankles stay relaxed. In this stage, you begin to sense a softening movement under your shoulder blades – a sense of a collapsing inward. From time to time, change your hand position to “monkey fists,” crawling on your knuckles, to integrate your hands, wrists, elbows, forearms and upper arm bones. This technique releases your rhomboid muscles, the muscles that draw your shoulder blades together, allowing them to shift down and move out of the way to free your neck, shoulders, hands and arms.



### Standing

The fourth stage, *Standing*, is a stable, vertical, non-traveling architecture. Begin squatting, monkey-like, in this stage of waiting and resting, giving the full weight of your body to your feet. Build strength and flexibility by resting into gravity. Your adult structure is designed to best support this stage by placing one whole foot flat on the ground for stability, while

the other foot rests on the ball, heel up. Make adjustments from the ground up to support your body's way. Depending on your bone and muscle alignment, you might bring your thighs closer together or farther apart to widen your foundation. You might turn your toes in or out. Everything you do should add to your comfort and dynamic ease, the sensation of being stable, relaxed and supported in your whole body, including your rib cage, head and neck. Stand in a way that creates the alignment you need to look up freely and extend your arms upward. With your rib cage mobile and your hands and arms free, wait until you feel the impetus to rise and stand. When you sense it, push down to the earth through your feet, rising to stand fully upright on two feet.



## **Walking**

The fifth stage of development, *Walking*, is a vertical, mobile, flexible and stable moving architecture. Human-like, walking is the dynamic action of catching yourself from falling, which involves two actions: a stance and a step. Integrated, these actions create the forward motion of traveling as an upright, bi-pedal being. Enter this stage by first rising onto the balls of your feet and walking with your heels up. When you are ready, drop your heels and allow them to lead your walk, rolling through your heel onto your whole foot. In this final stage, practice “body gratitude,” noticing and naming the changes that have occurred in your body out loud.

## Tips: Beginning and ending your Nia 5 Stages practice

To create a reference point from which to recognize physical changes, always begin your practice by walking around the room to sense your body as it is now. As you walk, begin by noticing where your body feels heavy, blocked or “dense.” Do you feel stiffness or pain in your thighs, buttocks, ankles or neck? Where do you sense energy being blocked? Second, inhale and *smell the moment*, breathing deeply to notice your internal volume and space as it is now. Then, using a scale of 1 – 10, rate the volume and space available in your body (10 meaning you have a lot of space; 1 meaning you have very little). Remember this number, and then after your Nia 5 Stages practice, repeat this “walking and noticing” process again. Give voice to the changes you notice by saying out loud: *“Thank you body. I sense (state what you sense).”* Breathe deeply again and give voice to the amount of change by saying: *“I was a (starting number) and now I am a (number on your body scale now).”*

Each day, practice the Nia 5 Stages at home for five minutes, spending one minute in each stage or until your body is ready to move on. Observe how your core – your pelvis, chest, head and spine – begin to move differently in this practice and in your daily life. Notice how your physical and emotional expression changes, how your thinking and moving patterns shift.

## PART 2: The Chakras and the Nia 5 Stages

### The Chakras

The Sanskrit word for “wheel,” chakras are often described as small, rotating vortices of energy that run vertically along your spine. Chakras are designed to metabolize physical vibrations of energy, which we experience as seeing, hearing, feeling, sensing, intuiting and intellectual knowing. Similar to acupuncture points, each chakra is associated with an endocrine gland and a major nerve plexus in the body. Historically, chakras are said to absorb *chi* or *prana* – sometimes referred to as “universal energy” – essentially breaking energy into parts, much like your digestive system, and distributing it to your whole body via your nervous system, endocrine glands, blood, bones and muscles. In this way, the chakra system provides energetic nourishment for your physical body.

When your physical energy is able to freely circulate, your mental, emotional and spiritual experiences become brighter and more acute. Your body can move without blockage, allowing you to literally sense *more*. This heightened awareness and sensitivity creates a feeling of stability, freedom and “space” inside, a platform from which to detect internal and external disturbances with more ease and agility and return to balance more quickly.

The Nia 5 Stages aligns the core and activates the chakra system, moving energy through your body in the same process you used to develop sensory awareness (Sensory IQ) as a child. This creates a powerful language through which understand what your body needs for conditioning and healing. Because your entire chakra system is housed in the three body weights of your core – your pelvis, chest and head – focusing on your core and its relationship to the chakra system as you practice the Nia 5 Stages is a powerful way to gain enormous benefits from each experience.

Each day, consciously connect to one chakra. Notice how this mindfulness affects the way you relate to your core – to your pelvis, chest and head. Observe the changes in your body, mind and emotions that arise from this awareness. The Nia way to consciously connect to your body is simple: *sense and direct*. *Sensing* simply means noticing – noticing changes in temperature, texture and movement patterns; areas of freedom and areas of blockage or resistance.

*Directing* means recognizing the parts of you that need attention and actively changing something until comfort and pleasure return.

Read about each of the chakras below, and then focus on sensing for areas of blockage in your Nia 5 Stages practice, directing energy and breath to those areas to self-heal and condition your body.

**First Chakra** – Base or Root. The first chakra is stimulated by moving your coccyx, located at the base of your tailbone. Moving your whole pelvis stimulates the flow of energy through this chakra to your legs, coccyx and sex organs. Activating this chakra generates sensations of security and trust in life, developing a strong connection between your body and the earth.

**Second Chakra** – The Sexual Center. The second chakra is housed in your pelvis and is affected by pelvic movement and subtle chest motions. Located near the first lumbar area of your spine, this chakra stimulates your large intestine, spleen, bladder, lower back and sex organs. Move this chakra to develop a strong connection between your male and female sexual sides – to stimulate your powers of creation.

**Third Chakra** – Solar Plexus. The third chakra, located at the mid-thoracic area of your spine, is affected by movement of your pelvis, chest and head (the three body weights). Movement of this chakra stimulates your heart, lungs, stomach, liver, adrenals, pancreas, kidneys, diaphragm, gall bladder, small intestines and duodenum. Move this chakra to heighten your self-confidence, will and personal power.

**Fourth Chakra** – The Heart. The fourth chakra – often called the “heart” chakra – is located at the first, second and third thoracic vertebrae of your spine. It is mainly affected by movement of your chest and rib cage. Like the third chakra, movement of this chakra stimulates your heart, lungs, stomach, liver, adrenals, pancreas, kidneys, diaphragm, gall bladder, small intestines and duodenum. Move this chakra to develop a connection to the experience of love, compassion, joy, hate and sorrow.

**Fifth Chakra** – The Throat. The fifth chakra is located near the third cervical vertebrae of your spine and is affected by head and neck movements. This chakra stimulates your whole head, including your eyes, ears, face and throat. Move this chakra to sense, activate and gain freedom of self-expression.

**Sixth Chakra** – Brow or “Third Eye.” The sixth chakra is located at the first cervical vertebrae of the spine. Movement of this chakra also stimulates your head, face, eyes, ears and throat. Move this center to develop a connection to intuition, to physically sense what you intellectually and emotionally recognize.

**Seventh Chakra** – Crown. The seventh chakra has no spinal contact. Located above the crown of your head, this chakra is affected by your intention – by your conscious connection to things beyond the physical realm. Centered at the point of your pineal gland (which produces the serotonin derivative *melatonin*), the seventh chakra stimulates spiritual energy and creates a connection between your physical and ethereal bodies. Move this chakra to develop a connection between your self and your innately divine energy.

## Safety Tips – Working with the Chakras

### Grounding

Physically “ground” your body before and after working with the chakras to “check in” and set a reference point for the changes that occur through your practice. One way to ground is to jump up and down three times and exhale a “huh!” sound as your bare feet touch the earth. Notice how your body feels in terms of overall comfort, balance and ease of breathing. When you have finished your chakra exercise, end by closing your eyes and “air brushing” to check in with yourself: with your palms facing inward, imagine brushing energy up along the front of your body as you inhale, and then turn your palms down and push energy down toward the ground as you exhale. Check in with the sensations of your body now. Repeat several times until you sense you are “done.”

### Tapping

Tapping directly on a chakra point is a great way to get energy moving before you work with it. Exhale deeply and focus on staying consciously relaxed to stay in your “now” body to keep your mind from wandering or “tripping out.”

### Breathing

Focus on breathing deeply and evenly throughout your practice. You may be activating more energy than usual – and you will also be more sensitive to this energy – which can lead to hyperventilation unless you maintain awareness of your breath. As you work with your chakras, pay close attention to how you feel. If you feel light-headed or dizzy, slow down your exhale and physically ground yourself in a comforting way, such as patting your belly or jumping up and down and sounding “yes.”

### Notice the Effects

After your chakra practice, take some time to notice the effects. If you feel jittery, edgy, unbalanced or “out of sorts,” back off a bit next time; you are doing too much. Just as you can pull a muscle by stretching too far, you can over-activate one more chakras. Start slowly and build your practice in your own time, to safely develop your ability to move more energy and end each experience feeling cleansed, relaxed, alert, harmonious and stimulated. Less is always best in the beginning.

### Be aware of emotions

Movement of the pelvis, chest and head releases physical and emotional holding patterns, which can trigger both joyful and uncomfortable feelings. This is perfectly normal. Even small movements can result in powerful emotional releases, so go slowly in the beginning and be gentle with your movement. Never force. Guide yourself with compassion and love. If more sensations and emotions arise than you are prepared to deal with, simply back off and move less. Keep in mind: The key to self-healing and whole-body integration is to move with gentle care and attention to what you sense.

### Volume Up, Volume Down

To help control the amount of energy moving in and out of your chakras, use the “*volume up, volume down*” method. If physical or emotional sensations become too intense, back off by consciously turning your “volume” down. If you feel ready to take more energy in, turn your volume up! In this case, try using your voice – *sounding* is a great way to activate more energy. And remember: It is always okay to stop. You are in control.

## PART 3: The Chakras and the Core of the Body

	Pelvis	Chest	Head
<b>Chakras Contained</b>	1st , 2nd, 3rd	4th	5th, 6th, 7th
<b>Function</b>	Stores Energy	Exchanges Energy	Directs Energy
<b>Emotional Effects of Movement</b>	Triggers positive and negative feelings of security, sexuality, fear, vitality, creativity and safety.	Triggers positive and negative feelings of love, joy, sorrow, hate and grief.	Triggers sense of self, order, comprehension, tracking and confidence.
<b>Balances and Integrates:</b>	The Coccyx and Sacrum	The Heart and Lungs	The Vestibular System and Inner Ear



# Nia 5 Stages, the Core and the Chakras

Practice tips for creating a conscious connection in your Nia 5 Stages practice

## The Pelvis

Freeing the first and second chakras

- Sense the fullness of your inhale and exhale.
- Slow down and lengthen your exhale to stimulate a deeper inhale.
- Engage your breath and your core by using “tip of the tongue” breathing (touching the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth).
- Use your breathing to stay aware of all five sensations: Flexibility, Agility, Mobility, Stability and Strength (FAMSS).
- Cultivate the sensation of *stability* by sensing your own flow, your unique expression of power and grace.
- Focus on moving your bones through space, rather than your muscles.
- Incorporate *sounding* into your dance, using words to blend your movement, thoughts and feelings with your body and breath.
- Balance all action with the sensation of relaxation to sense dynamic ease – feel tension melting off your body as you move.
- Focus on the sensation of *stability* by consciously sensing yourself stopping and resting on any foundation that supports you from underneath and behind.
- Imagine talking to your pelvis, letting your body know it is okay to move sensually.
- Enjoy the movement of your pelvis and allow yourself to receive pleasure from your body.
- Imagine your pelvis as a bowl of water. Sense the creative liquid it holds.
- Imagine your pelvis as a crystal bowl. Sense your unique resonance magnified 1,000 times.
- Sense the back of your heart opening like a window to release feelings of anger, sadness and frustration as it welcomes fresh, clean, joyful energy in.
- Shrug your shoulders, and on the “down” shrug, sound the words “Yes!” and “No!” to acknowledge and announce your boundaries.
- Close your eyes and inhale deeply, sensing the expansion of your lungs, and imagine pink light flowing effortlessly in and out as you breathe.
- Imagine wiggling the bones of your chest as if they are trying to escape from your skin. Sense your skin stretching to make space for the “you” inside to come out and fully interact with life.
- Sigh, hum and sing to move energy throughout your chest, using vibration and sound to release any physical or emotional areas that have become stuck.

## The Head

Freeing the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Chakras

- Use sight and sound to support movement of your head. Look and see the world dancing around you, listen to the sounds of life, and move your head toward the sensations that call you. Tune into sensation and ask yourself: “Where do I need to direct energy to find more comfort, pleasure and joy?”
- Imagine a white feather running along the back of your head, reaching high into the sky and tickling the bellies of the clouds. Tap into the divine pool of energy above.
- Nod your head “yes” and announce what you love, need and desire to the world.
- Use language and sounding to activate breath and vocal vibrations. Allow your voice to guide your body and head movements, stopping your sounding only when you stop moving.
- Focus on keeping your tongue alive and mobile in your mouth to relax your facial muscles, cheeks and lips.

## The Chest

Freeing the Third and Fourth Chakras

- Imagine you are taking love in through your chest. Sense the front of your heart stretching and yawning to make space for the new energy you are receiving.