

# A better *life*

Marina Moeller



What are the essential ingredients of a happy and fulfilled life? For most of us, the basics include good health, a cheerful mood, loving family and friends, career success and exciting hobbies. So how do we attain the missing components? Swiss News turned to three experts to advise us on improving the quality of our lives.

# Body

Integrative massage therapist, movement teacher, choreographer, dancer, former director of a creative contemporary dance company and one of the original members of the Boston Rock Opera, Jane Greis is multi-talented. She holds a BA in humanities from Santa Clara University in California, an MA in dance studies from the Laban Centre in London and a diploma in muscular therapy from Ben Benjamin's Muscular Therapy Institute in Boston.

**Jane, your credentials are very impressive. You directed your own dance company and worked in theatre, performed, taught students, worked in publishing in the US and Switzerland and now you run your own integrative massage and movement practice, Wellspring Massage in the Zurich area. How have you managed to fit so many diverse things into your life?**

It's all really very much related. Throughout my career, I've been lucky to be surrounded by artistic and imaginative people. And I am very creative myself so I love integrating all kinds of things together. Initially, my calling was choreography, creating dances for the stage, especially in collaboration with other artists. Like many dancers, working with the body intensely on a daily basis led me to study massage at the Muscular Therapy Institute. I have learned a lot about dance through bodywork, and a lot about bodywork through my dance experience. My therapeutic work is informed by my experiences as a creative artist and teacher and, especially since moving to Switzerland, very much by nature.

**What is an integrative massage and movement therapy?**

This approach is a combination of muscular therapy techniques including Swedish, deep tissue, and sports massage as well as techniques from myofascial release and craniosacral therapy. These hands-on techniques are supported by guided imagery, creative movement exploration and customized exercises. In addition, I teach my clients strategies and tips for self-care and movement awareness practices, so they can take care of themselves between visits.

**How can massage and bodywork help?**

First of all, massage relieves stress, improves blood circulation, relaxes muscles and encourages general relaxation. It has also been shown to improve posture and flexibility, lower blood pressure, and strengthen the immune system. It can also be very effective in reducing insomnia, anxiety and depression. And more generally, it enables us to become healthier, more relaxed, embodied, confident, creative and intuitive.

**Is it for everyone? Who can benefit most?**

Absolutely. We are all human beings with bodies. Our bodies are highly intelligent and are speaking to us constantly. The deep relaxation and body awareness

# and soul

gained from hands-on bodywork and movement education help us learn to listen to the body and interpret its messages. It can be a great source of guidance in life and a recipe for wellbeing. People interested in living an embodied holistic lifestyle will benefit most from this kind of approach, as well as those experiencing a lot of stress in their lives, physical and otherwise. Good candidates are also people in transition, for example (new birth, new job, moving to a new country), athletes and performers, and, of course the many of us who sit at desks and in front of computers all day. A good therapist will always customize a session to the needs of the individual.

**Most of us do spend a lot of time in front of the computer in addition to working at desk jobs. Is there a way to reduce the damage this lifestyle inflicts on our body?**

People who sit in front of the computer all day are often not moving much in general yet are inflicting a lot of stress on certain muscle groups, exacerbated by bad body mechanics and a poorly set-up workspace. They tend to have a lot of tension in their necks, shoulders and arms. This kind of chronic abuse can lead to seriously debilitating repetitive stress disorders. This was one of my areas of concentration at massage school in Boston. I worked with a lot of people whose work made them prone to repetitive stress injuries, for instance office workers, dentists, dancers and musicians.

Integrative therapy can help in two distinct ways. Regular general relaxation and deep tissue massage can relieve the tension in chronically overused muscles and create the conditions such that the body can begin to heal itself. This is then combined with particular exercises and education about movement habits and information about how best to set up one's work environment. In this way we address the cause as well as the symptoms.

**How can your work help other aspects, in addition to purely physical benefits?**

This is where it gets really interesting for me – the place where bodywork becomes body-and-soulwork. I chose to call my practice Wellspring. A wellspring can be defined as a renewable source of health, vitality and nourishment that originates in nature. I am interested in showing people how embodiment practices such as movement and bodywork can be a path to this place of abundant inner resources, creativity and nature connection.

**How can it be combined with other therapies?**

I believe the work that a person does individually can be greatly enhanced by participating in group classes and workshops, where participants dive deep into the material in a safe and supportive group environment. To this end, I offer workshops and classes in authentic movement and moving in nature. Authentic movement is a form of dance therapy and a practice for sourcing one's creativity. It is a

contemplative form, similar to a moving meditation, whose origins spring from Carl Jung's work in active imagination. I love collaborating with others and I often work with yoga educator and colour therapist Tatjana Popov. It's real body-and-soul work that blends dance, yoga philosophy, painting and writing. Tatjana's work with colour is a synthesis of several different approaches and is grounded in a deep understanding of the yogic science of chakras. Together we explore through the arts how colour can affect us on all levels – our bodies, minds, emotions and spirits.

**Any tips for our readers they can apply in daily life?**

Learning to pay attention is the first step. Take five minutes every day and sit quietly with your eyes closed; simply focus on your body. What are you feeling, where are the areas of tension, of ease? Nature is great medicine. If you live near a park or forest, spend some time in nature several times a week and notice how different you feel.



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Color therapy and authentic movement workshop

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# Mind and emotions

Mindfulness trainer Ela Amarie holds a degree in psychology from the University of Bucharest and certificates in mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and cognitive therapy (MBCT) from the German Institute of Mindfulness. Ela believes that mindfulness is a fundamental ingredient of a healthy and efficient lifestyle and she works with individuals and companies to spread its benefits.

**Ela, before founding your Mindful Brain practice, you worked for many years in human resources in Romania and Switzerland. Mindfulness is a relatively new field and little known in Switzerland. What led you to it?**

After spending 13 years in corporate environment, I was going through a difficult transitional phase and I decided to take responsibility for my own well-being. I attended a course in Cultivation of Emotional Balance, conducted by the Santa Barbara Institute for Conscious Studies. During that training everything transformed for me because I was able to recognize changes in the way my mind was working: less mental chatting, more clarity, more peace, joy and resilience. And that inspired me to get certification in mindfulness-based stress reduction interventions, to share my knowledge and transformation with others.

**Can you please define mindfulness for us?**

Mindfulness is a basic human quality and it refers to a particular state of mind, one that is alert, aware and fully present. Because we often function on an automatic pilot, the route to mindfulness is through attention training. When we live with greater attention and presence, we respond more effectively to any given situation – be it positive, negative or neutral – in a way that benefits our general well-being.

**Is mindfulness an inborn or acquired skill?**

We all already possess mindfulness somewhere, often buried deep within ourselves. We live in times of increasing complexity, distraction and emotional turmoil. The overload of information and the overuse of technology weaken our ability to be present and leave us day after day more exhausted, out of balance and unfulfilled.

The Harvard Business School talks about “attention deficit trait” or “continuous partial attention”, this inability to stay focused on one particular task. So we need to develop our capacity to be mindful. Just as gym workouts can deliver a toned body, in order to improve our focus, concentration and build emotional resilience we need to train our brain.

**What are the benefits? How can it help?**

It helps us reconnect with life, instead of always wandering in our minds to past or future events. We keep forgetting that the only real life is in the present moment.

When we master mindfulness, we learn to control and better manage our negative emotions and high-pressure situations. We learn to regulate mental activity and be in charge, reducing stress. Mindfulness strengthens our attention, increases our



efficiency and productivity, alleviates medical conditions related to chronic pain, fatigue, anxiety, sleep disturbances. It also helps us to become more attentive to those around us, improving the quality of our relations.

**How long does it take to awaken this ability to be mindful within oneself?**

I usually teach mindfulness to individuals or groups in eight sessions. There are different types of interventions, targeted to specific needs (e.g. MBSR or mindful eating). All sessions include discussions and meditation practices. Mindfulness meditation is at the core of mindfulness training. It is a very simple form of meditation, where you concentrate on your breathing. In addition to meditation, the homework involves executing specific activities in a mindful way. The most basic example is eating. When you focus exclusively on the experience of eating, you rediscover a new relationship with food.

**What about your work with organizations?**

Official statistics shows that about 30% of Swiss working population suffers from stress or burn out. I work with companies to help their workers to reduce stress and distractions, improving productivity and efficiency.

**Can you share one of your techniques to relieve stress and improve concentration?**

When you feel very stressed out and agitated, slow down and try the acronym S.T.O.P: S – stop whatever you are doing for two to three seconds. T – take a breath, breathe naturally. O – observe your thoughts, feelings and body sensations. P – proceed: continue what you were doing.

**Any final advice you would like to share with our readers?**

The neuroscience has proven over and over again that mind training can change the brain so we can literally learn to sculpt the brain in order to live our lives to the fullest. I firmly believe that happiness is in the present moment and it is a trainable skill. When you learn to be happy in the present moment, you take responsibility for your own well-being. It is one of the main ingredients of mental health and emotional balance.

## Ela Amarie

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# Career and family

Désirée Steinmann is a professional life and business coach, management trainer and a book author, who lived in Germany, Czech Republic and Canada before settling down in Switzerland. Her Steinmann International coaching consultancy recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

**Désirée, you have extensive experience of advising clients in Switzerland and abroad, as well as teaching corporate workshops. What kind of coaching do you specialize in?**

I believe in a holistic approach to coaching, meaning I don't limit myself to a particular area, like leadership, family or career. Coaching is a process you take people through, where you explore the situation, changes to make and goals to achieve. You ask questions, discuss different angles, identify new possibilities, find blind spots. In my coaching any topic has a space, anything is open to being talked about: career, relationships, spirituality, health.

**What does a typical coaching session entail?**

Depending on the client's personality, I use either a visual or regular approach. A regular session is a conversation, while with visual clients we summarize every thought and idea on paper. We work with crayons, sticky notes, mind maps, visual facilitations. We create visual representations, and then we step back, observe and identify connections which we wouldn't see without a big picture we have put together.

**Is coaching for everyone?**

Coaching is effective for those who want it. Some people like to stay in their drama, and then coaching is not for them, because coaching is about moving forward. It is also very important to find a coach who works for you and then you can get far. I and many other coaches offer complimentary first consultations so you can see if you connect well.

**What is one way to motivate new expats?**

Cultural differences add another layer to coaching. Many people lose their identity or feel incompetent in their new countries until they understand the way of life there. We discuss together why they are here. And if they dwell too much on what they left behind and what they are missing, I have to refocus them on what they want to get out of living here, that shifts them from loss to opportunity.

**What is the most important to know before starting your own business?**

The first thing is to understand why. Why do you want to start your own business? If you are not passionate enough about it, you won't have enough energy and focus to sustain yourself in difficult times – and they will come. The more you are personally aligned with what and how you want to do, the higher the success level will be.

**What is number one mistake expats make when they start their business in Switzerland?**

They don't understand how the market is different. They come with the business model they know from their home country but it doesn't translate into something that works here. Also some focus exclusively on the expat market and because of their fear of the local market, completely miss out on it.

**What do you say to wake people up to their power?**

I use the concept of being 100% responsible for yourself. As long as you blame others, you are not taking ownership. I allow those clients to see that staying in the situation where they feel victimized is a choice. For example, if I have to stay in my job because the job market is bad, I can either blame my boss or opt to see what it enables me to have (my home, vacations etc.). Shift your focus, reclaim the ownership, and it will change your emotional experience.

**What are the best techniques for overcoming fears and taking control of your own destiny?**

Ask yourself what is the worst thing that could happen if you are hesitant to play strong or play big? By identifying it, you might realize that the worst thing that could happen is not so bad after all, and it will free you to make that bold step. Another question I often use with my clients: if everything were possible, what would you do? When we erase our limits, we get closer to our true desires.

**What advice can you give to expats?**

See it as an opportunity. You can redefine who you are today. Connect with people who inspire you instead of people who bring you down, become clear on how this experience can further develop you or move you forward, and be open-minded and curious instead of judgemental and closed.

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