



harthouseoft

Follow



## The Mitzvah Technique: Rediscovering



OW

Mitzvah Technique instructor Toshie Okabe remembers it as if it had happened yesterday. She was sitting in her car and watched as a lady slipped and fell on the sidewalk while walking her grandchild to school.

“She wasn’t really hurt,” says Toshie, “but she didn’t have anything to hold on to, so she couldn’t stand up. When I helped her to her feet, she was so embarrassed that she couldn’t even get up without assistance.”

Sadly, it’s a problem Toshie continues to see—one whose roots go back as far as elementary school, where bad habits are first developed. Sometimes it happens even earlier, given the ever increasing number of babies using tablets and watching TV.

“As children, we all have good posture. We can squat. We can sit up on the floor with a natural arch in the back with our head sitting perfectly on the spine. But then we begin to sit for hours. We stop moving as much. In time, we all lose what we used to have instinctually.”



***Mitzvah Technique instructor Toshie Okabe holds a picture showing a baby with perfect posture.***

After years of hunching, crossing our legs, poking our heads forward, sitting on soft chairs, and carrying books and bags, most of us develop unnecessary, unnatural chronic pain and discomfort.

Sadly, we wait until we experience problems before we do anything about it. And while it's never too late to improve our posture and our ability to move, it pays off to act sooner rather than later.

Toshie compares it to a tall building whose fifth floor is off by a few feet. The damage to the structure could be severe. But bring it back until it's properly aligned, and disaster can be prevented.

Getting the body back into proper alignment doesn't necessarily involve doing yoga or Pilates, according to Toshie. In fact, your foundation has to be in near perfect condition already if you are to do these exercises

properly, she says. Mitzvah helps you discover the roots of your postural and movement problems and is a safe, gentle way to prepare you for all activities.

Even if you can't (or won't) enrol in a Mitzvah class, here are a few simple tension-releasing tips you can use right away: Stop sitting for prolonged periods of time. Make sure you get up as often as you can, ideally every 15 to 20 minutes. Instead of sitting up straight, lean against the back of a chair that is lower than your shoulder blades (this avoids slouching). At the very least, move around a bit on your chair. Use the stairs often.

“It's like ‘shaking the dressing,’” says Toshie, referring to the effect of Mitzvah on the circulatory system. She says that contrary to what people think, muscles aren't passive when you're sitting down—they are tightening up.

“It's such an abuse to sit still. People even forget to breath properly.”

## The history of the Mitzvah Technique

The Mitzvah Technique revolves around what founder M. Cohen-Nehemia calls the Mitzvah Mechanism. Apparent in children and cultures with more active, natural lifestyles (like the nomadic Bedouin of the Sinai Desert), this mechanism triggers an upward rippling motion that lengthens the spine, expands the chest, widens the back, and results in the free balancing of the head on the spine.

Having initially taught the Alexander Technique, another popular method to improve posture and movement, Nehemia created Mitzvah so that he could teach students how to move in a more natural, less intellectual way.

“Mitzvah is more like learning to ride a bike,” says Toshie. “It's more instinct-based than the Alexander Technique. And of course, it also works with the rippling motion Nehemia discovered by studying the Bedouins; it's a motion we all have when we walk, a dynamic movement

of the pelvis, so every time you do it, you release tension from your body. This is unique to Mitzvah.”

Interested in learning more? Our popular [Mitzvah class](#) is very reasonably priced and will offer you the opportunity to work directly with Toshie. In the meantime, if you want to learn more about the history behind the Mitzvah Technique, visit [Toshie’s website](#).

***This blog is part of a new series on Mitzvah and other systems which are taught at Hart House. To avoid missing these posts, please subscribe now if you haven’t already.***

#mitzvah #hart house classes #health and fitness

 Blaze

