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# HUMAN

# engineering

BY MARK BERRIMAN



**Chas Barclay runs Human Engineering from his studio in Crows Nest, Sydney. Unlike most personal trainers, Chas focuses on how an individual's body moves under natural conditions and designs a program of stretches and exercises to get that body moving correctly. His clients include, on one extreme, people wanting to improve their sports performance and strength, and on the other, people with injuries or health conditions who are seeking natural remedies by addressing lifestyle factors. He sees himself as a coach, rather than a trainer.**



**C**has' approach is based on the Corrective Holistic Exercise Kinesiology (C.H.E.K.) Institute's Results Program System and he is a registered C.H.E.K. Practitioner himself. The Institute is an elite educational and corrective exercise centre based in Vista, California, and is recognised among exercise and health professionals as the world leader in functional and rehabilitative exercise conditioning.

The C.H.E.K. Institute approach to corrective exercise is representative of the education and philosophies of the founder, Paul Chek, whose unique approach to rehabilitation and performance exercise prescription stems from his diverse professional and educational background, which includes sports massage therapy and neuromuscular therapy.

Unlike the 'one approach fits all' method, Chas runs a detailed physical evaluation for a new client, including medical background, photographs and measurements. To achieve the desired outcome – the body moving in harmony, with correct posture – he uses a range of modalities which include osteopathy, massage and nutrition. This embraces exercises from Feldenkrais to Qi Gong, but he is not limited to any one modality.

"The problem with the 'one size fits all' concept," says Chas, "is that it does not appreciate a person's functional movement patterns. In fact most of my clients are members of gyms who have come to grief by forcing themselves into pre-established exercise routines. My

approach is to teach them how to utilise resources that are available to them in different circumstances."

For a person who is travelling and may not have access to their gym or home fitness equipment, Chas explains how there are many objects, such as beds, furniture and even doorways, which will function quite adequately as a substitute for exercise equipment. The added advantage is that it is easier for a person to regularly incorporate stretches and exercises into their daily routine and not feel handicapped in virtually any situation.

All the sessions are one-on-one. As Chas stresses, attention to a client's individual movements is not achievable in a class exercise scenario.

"One of the main complaints from clients is the pain from knee and hip issues," he says. "These are invariably generated by the way in which people stand and walk throughout the day. My job is to break the pattern which leads to that pain."

Chas' clients are aged from six to seventy-nine. There is no restriction, he says, because we all use our bodies every day regardless of age. Not all his clients are necessarily sports people or professional dancers. One client was a professional snooker player who found that his health condition was directly attributable to spending so much of his time in an air-conditioned environment, eating fast food and – most importantly – dehydration. After a few sessions, he was able to overcome the fatigue he felt during tournaments.

"There is a lot of stress which directly affects the way our bodies move – it

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comes from relationships, children, unpaid bills, the wrong type of food – it all adds up,” he says.

One of the main offenders is new technology which has actually created a whole new generation of posture problems. Chas has seen more and more children with inherent problems at an early age. “The Human Engineering concept is not necessarily new”, he says. “A book written over one hundred years ago recommended that desks and chairs in primary schools should be adjustable to accommodate different sized pupils and their growth. Yet we are only now seeing adjustable furniture, such as desks manufactured by IKEA which have adjustable legs. Even companies are now using them for better employee efficiency.”

Among Chas’s other common clients are women who have undergone Caesarean section births in which all four of the major abdominal muscles have been cut (the same as for appendectomy). He trains these women to get strength back into the abdominal wall so that they can readjust to normal daily life as soon as possible.

Even if there is no immediate pain, poor posture and movement patterns reinforce certain muscular movements which create fatigue because the muscles are not being used directly for motion but to support incorrect and inherently stressful positions and movements. The body

compensates for each back posture. For this reason, he explains the importance of showing his clients how to use core muscles in everyday movement patterns.

“In most cultures, squatting is a natural posture, yet many Westerners are unable to do this. My philosophy is back to basics – food, exercise and stress reduction. What we do is always a question of choice.”

Chas is scornful of the development of exercise machines, which first made their appearance in the 1960s. He sees this whole phenomenon as a glitch in human physiology. “We have since moved back to the basics – medicine balls, weights, clubs and bells, just like we had one hundred years ago. Part of the problem has simply been the limited amount of space available in gyms. Machines provide a convenient form of stationary exercise.”

Unfortunately, there are so many ways of doing exercises incorrectly that they can be counter-productive. Chas spends a lot of time making sure that his clients are doing the movements correctly so that they achieve optimal results. ◆

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