Principle 7

Three Planes of Movement and Intensity Levels

Three Planes of Movement: page 2
Intensity Levels: page 11
Three Planes of Movement

Catch Phrases: Sink and Rise
Introduction

As children, we move our bodies in different planes and ranges of motion as we learn to walk, preparing ourselves for an upright life. We crawl, we squat, we reach high on our tiptoes, then fold toward the ground. However as we get older, our tendency to move in different planes decreases. The more “adult” we become, the less we sit on the floor or play on the ground. Such limited range of motion can cause our vertical alignment to deteriorate over time, until our activities eventually become limited to getting in and out of a car, or on and off a chair. Even physically fit runners tend to move in limited planes, developing strength and mobility in one (upright) plane, while growing increasingly stiff and immobile in middle and lower planes of movement. Working with different planes and ranges of motion allows our bodies to reclaim and sustain the natural movement abilities we were born with.

The body is designed to build strength by moving as a whole. When we learn to walk, we begin by creeping on the floor, which prepares us to move into crawling, crouching and finally into standing and walking. These actions strengthen our core, upper and lower bodies, limbs, joints and respiratory and nervous systems. Moving through this process is how we develop strong, agile bodies, as well as emotional and mental adaptability. Nia teaches us that in order to maintain our natural movement potential throughout life, we must maintain the ability to move like a child.

When developing Nia, we discovered how consciously moving in three planes provided a natural way to open and relax the spine, knees and hips. It increased our mobility and agility – and thus, our playfulness! It brought out the child in us, accessing the spirit that had been squashed by societal beliefs about “appropriate” movement and age. We began to open and fold like an accordion, shifting our bodies fluidly and riding waves of vertical and horizontal energy. Shimmying, shaking and playing in space – moving in and out of the three planes – helped us reclaim our natural vitality and have fun with our bodies, just like a child.
Knowing the power of this process, we developed “plane work” in Nia. Plane work is Nia’s answer to reclaiming flexibility, agility, mobility, strength and stability (FAMSS) in the whole body. Regardless of fitness level, plane work involves moving through three vertical planes of movement: high, middle and low.

Your body is designed to function most efficiently when it is vertically aligned. When your vertical alignment is off, you can easily be uprooted and thrown off base; your transitions will feel choppy, your dance will lack fluidity or agility, your spine will feel rigid, and you may feel a disconnection between your legs, spine and upper body. The feeling of being “pulled off balance” is the Voice of Your Body asking you to adjust your vertical alignment. To sense your alignment, begin by moving vertically, along the line of your spine. Bend your knees within a comfortable range and lower yourself while keeping your body upright. Leaning forward weakens your center and energetically feels like falling. Leaning horizontally constricts your breathing and causes your muscles to tense, which reduces your overall strength. Remain upright or consciously fold, but avoid leaning.

To transfer body weight, we use a Nia technique called the “Smile Line.” The Smile Line helps you move in an efficient, grounded way that is easy on your joints and skeletal system. Whether you are moving fast or slow, dramatically or subtly, as you shift weight, move your body down toward the ground and back up again, as if following the curve of a smile. This technique allows you to move along the path of least resistance, where your power and strength are united.

When moving along the Smile Line, your body looks like a basketball player about to shoot the ball. Your knees soften as your body grounds downward to prepare for movement. Your joints feel energy-filled and spring-loaded, allowing you to stay relaxed yet powerful. Like a cat ready to pounce, you are now positioned to move from a place of grounded power.

Consciously move along a Smile Line every time you shift weight. Use Heel Lead to support this technique, creating stability and support from the ground up.
Voice of

Body
To your physical body, I offer many spaces and places to explore, to move through and slip into. I take you on a vertical and horizontal ride, helping you move through space in a way that heals and realign your body. I support your spatial exploration, inviting you to move from a rigid place to a world of fluidity and grace. Through me, you experience the constant interaction of your energy and the energy around you. I teach you to ebb and flow in and out of space, seeking comfort and ease as markers of healing. I help you regain what it was to be a child, agile and available to all kinds of movement: squatting, jumping, running, dancing, playing on the floor and rising up into space.

Mind
To your mental body, I offer a fluid, permeable framework on which to ground and move from. Alive and organic, I offer you a way to keep your own movement design alive, shifting from one place to another in continuous motion. I make it possible for you to observe and sense the aliveness of the “now,” the comfort and pleasure of being in this moment. Allow me to guide you through the space in which your life unfolds.

Emotions
To your emotional body, I offer different ways to experience the rise and fall of energy, the many expressions of your unique being. Shift and change, moving through different planes, extremes and dynamics of self-expression. Sense the new emotions that arise every time you shift and ride these planes of energy; soar into life. Discover me everywhere you end up: here, there, up, down, in, out, over and under.

Spirit
To your spiritual body, I offer an active way to explore an ethereal world. Through me, you discover how to command; how to be a leader, a healer, the creator of your own new movement. I am the undying memory of re-creation and a string of endless choices. I am new, but of the same. I am your divine connection into the world of fluid, vertical and horizontal comfort. Allow me to guide you in and out of varying zones of bliss.
Science

- The Three Planes of Movement are personal and unique to each person.
- Consciously moving through all three planes strengthens the muscles of your base and maintains full range of motion in your joints. This is critical for reclaiming, sustaining and improving your ability to move toward and away from the floor with ease.
- Regularly test your ability to get up and down from the floor with ease. This is an excellent tool for measuring your functional fitness.
- You can continually improve your strength, dynamic ease and movement skill, regardless of your fitness level or physical condition, by consciously seeking the sensation of pleasure as you move through all three planes.
Craft

This part of Principle 7 encourages you to move your body through three planes of movement along a vertical line: high, middle and low. The range of motion within each plane is personal and unique to each person. The Smile Line is a Nia tool for supporting comfort, safety and conditioning when moving through planes. When practicing Nia steps, imagine your hara (located 2 inches below your belly button) following the Smile Line every time you shift weight. This will support you in sinking and rising with ease.

Three Planes of Movement  Sink and Rise

![Three Planes of Movement Diagram](image-url)
Recall

1. What is the triad for the Three Planes of Movement?
2. What is the catch phrase for the Three Planes of Movement?
3. Briefly describe the Three Planes of Movement.
Embodiment

For these exercises, refer to the book: The Nia Technique: The High-Powered Energizing Workout that Gives You a New Body and a New Life.

Exercise 1: Practice the 52 Moves while focusing on the Three Planes of Movement

Practice moving through all three planes as you perform the 52 Moves and pay attention to the sensations of conditioning you receive. Maintain relaxed, spring-loaded joints. Allow your hara to travel along the Smile Line as you sink and rise, as though you are scooping energy up from the earth with each step. Seek comfort and pleasure. If you sense imbalance or discomfort, you have gone too far. Repeat this exercise regularly to continue developing your ability to move through the three planes with ease, while building on your technique in the 52 Moves.

Exercise 2: Practice a Nia routine while focusing on the Three Planes of Movement

Practice moving through all three planes while dancing to any Nia routine. Focus on gently shifting your weight as you perform the steps and stances of the choreography, always seeking comfort and pleasure. Repeat this exercise regularly with a variety of Nia routines to enhance strength, mobility and stability in your base.
Art

To continue embodying the Three Planes of Movement, pay attention to how each of the planes is activated throughout your day and use imagery to move through them with ease. Here are some examples to get you started:

- As you as you reach for items on high shelves or cupboards, sense which of the three planes you are using.
- As you reach for items in the back bottom shelf of the refrigerator, sense which of the three planes you are using.
- As you play with a child or a pet, sense which of the three planes you are using.
- When moving in your low and middle planes, imagine you are sinking in water. Feel the water rising above your head.
- As you rise to a higher plane, sense the water parting over your head, over your shoulders and waist, lapping at your thighs. Feel the water washing down your whole body as you rise.
- As you reach upward, feel yourself pushing the water with your hands.
- Rise high into the clouds and sense their soft fluffiness at your waist.
- Move around in your middle plane and feel tall grass brushing your thighs.
- Become a puppet. Feel the freedom and playfulness in your joints as you give in to gravity.
- Imagine creating circles of energy with your hara as you move in and out of the three planes.
- Visualize your legs as accordions that fold and unfold as you move in and out of the low plane.
- As you open and close your ankle, knee and hip joints, imagine they are sponges squeezing out water.
- As you rise, allow light to enter imaginary windows in your joints. Watch the light flood in through the windows as you extend and open your joints.
- Imagine picking up a variety of different size boxes off the floor as you walk through a room.

Recapitulate
Recapitulate and then, in your Nia journal, describe what you experienced while practicing this part of Principle 7, Three Planes of Movement.
Intensity Levels

Conditioning the Body
Introduction

The Three Intensity Levels allow you to personalize every Nia move, encouraging you to adjust your movement to fit the moment. In Nia classes, we always offer three choices for performing each move, from the smallest to largest range of motion. For example, Level 1: slightly bend your knees; Level 2: deepen your bend; and Level 3: deepen your bend even more so your hips are close to the floor.

Use the Three Intensity Levels to choose what is the best for you from moment to moment by monitoring your comfort, breath and the sensation of ease. Practice each move in a way that feels right for you and personalize your practice by making your own choices. Do not force your body to move like any other body; this creates unnecessary tension and can cause injury. When your body moves with ease, it naturally takes care of itself. Choose what feels good and replace effort with ease. Replace will with desire.

Fall in love with the gifts you receive from each intensity level. Honor each level; allow your enthusiasm to be equally rich in whichever level you move in. Do not avoid or favor any one in particular; each provides its own unique benefits. If you avoid Level 1, you will miss the opportunity to develop precision and subtle movement sensitivity. If you avoid Level 3, you will never enjoy the thrill of realizing your potential. Remember: You are not doing Nia “better” if you choose a higher level. There are no preferences, only opportunities.

Always begin moving in Level 1. If that feels comfortable, move to Level 2, increasing your range of motion and exertion. If Level 2 feels comfortable, play with diving in and out of Level 3. Level 3 is meant to condition the body to move beyond its current level of fitness; it is not meant to be sustainable for long periods of time. Play with Level 3, briefly seeking your edge, then return to Level 2 or 1 as needed.
Voice of

Body
To your physical body, I guide you through the process of seeking comfort, ease, harmony and balance. I allow you to be your authentic self, to discover your own ways of moving by listening to my suggestions. I allow you to redesign the patterns you see, to create a flow of movement and energy for your unique spirit within the field of your human potential.

Mind
To your mental body, I offer unlimited potential. I reveal all the available options that fit your needs, desires and passions – right now. Listen to my language, for I will guide you toward choices that align you with your strongest, most balanced and harmonious self. I gently nurture you into fitness and health. I remind you it is okay to slow down, to adjust, to under-achieve, to rest and to challenge yourself lovingly. I am a compassionate teacher of the highest order.

Emotions
To your emotional body, I offer permission to choose what is right for you, what feels right in your heart and gut. I remind you that it is crucial for your health and fitness to express who you are in each moment. I beg you to show me who you truly are. I beg you to be in the full spectrum of your spirited self: playful, loving, afraid and unafraid, sure and unsure. With me, you are accepted fully.

Spirit
To your spiritual body, I help you create a self-designed, self-existing movement form. I offer you a way to be from within. I am the key to discovering who you are for yourself, for exploring what you truly feel and think. I take you into the deepest, most treasured places of growth, where you walk the path of transformation. I guide you to find the steps that will take you on the path most right for you.
Science

- Consciously activating the Three Intensity Levels is key to maintaining or improving your physical fitness.

- Level 1 conditions your neuromuscular system for movement subtlety, detail and precision.

- Level 2 conditions your cardiovascular, respiratory, muscular and skeletal systems by increasing your heart and respiratory rates for sustained periods of time as you move in larger ranges of motion.

- Level 3 further conditions your cardiovascular, respiratory, muscular and skeletal systems by using even larger ranges of motion and activating higher heart and respiratory rates for short durations.

- Utilizing all three intensity levels (rather than favoring one level or another) conditions your body for adaptability and improves overall functioning.

- Allowing people to choose from three intensity levels decreases the potential for injury and creates a safe, stimulating and fun environment for all fitness levels.

- Offering the option to choose from three intensity levels – and encouraging people to find the right level for themselves – empowers people to gain the most from each class by lovingly responding to their own needs.
Craft

This part of Principle 7 encourages you to choose from three intensity levels when moving. Level 1 (movements are close to the core), Level 2 (increased range of motion / exertion) and Level 3 (full range of motion / exertion). The look and feel of the three levels are personal and unique to each person. Each level offers unique conditioning benefits for the body, mind, emotions and spirit and should be explored with equal passion and curiosity.

Three Intensity Levels  Conditioning the Body

Level 3
Full Range of Motion
Most Exertion

Level 1
Close to the Core
Less Exertion

Level 2
Increased Range of Motion
More Exertion
Three Intensity Levels

Recall

1. What is the triad for the Three Intensity Levels?
2. What is the catch phrase for the Three Intensity Levels?
3. Briefly describe the Three Intensity Levels.
Embodiment

For these exercises, refer to the book: The Nia Technique: The High-Powered Energizing Workout that Gives You a New Body and a New Life.**

Exercise 1: Practice the 52 Moves while focusing on the Three Intensity Levels

Practice each of the 52 Moves in all three intensity levels and pay attention to the sensations of healing and conditioning you receive. Notice the unique experience each level brings to each move. What strengths, weaknesses and insights does Level 1 reveal to you? How are these different from Level 2 and Level 3? Seek comfort and pleasure in all levels. If you sense imbalance or discomfort, you have gone too far. Repeat this exercise regularly to develop your ability to listen the messages your body sends you about the best way to move in each moment.

Exercise 2: Practice a Nia routine while focusing on the Three Intensity Levels

Practice moving in and out of all three intensity levels while dancing to any Nia routine. Begin by consciously moving through all three levels as you dance. Then, focus on listening to which level your body is asking for and respond by seeking comfort and pleasure while moving in that level. Repeat this exercise regularly, with a variety of Nia routines, to develop the ability to personalize your movement and gain the most from every choice and action – on and off the dance floor.

Recapitulate

Recapitulate and then, in your Nia journal, describe what you experienced while practicing this part of Principle 7, Three Intensity Levels.
To further embody the Three Intensity Levels, pay attention to how each of the levels is activated throughout your day. Use imagery to activate your awareness. Here are some examples to get you started:

- Throughout the day, notice which intensity level you are walking in.
- As you fold laundry, are you using Level 1, 2 or 3?
- As you brush your teeth, which intensity level are you using?
- Imagine Level 1 holds profound subtle treasures. Explore Level 1 as though you are discovering a treasure chest.
- Become a connoisseur of Level 2, noticing each detail and nuance as though you are savoring fine wine.
- Imagine yourself as a blurry video when moving in Level 3, moving so quickly and with such large motions that the camera can’t capture all you do.

My Story
As you read about, practice and embody Principle 7, Three Planes of Movement and Intensity Levels, take some time to describe your personal story. How has Principle 7 affected your life?
Teacher Preparation

After embodying Principle 7: Three Planes of Movement and Intensity Levels, practice describing them aloud as if you are teaching the techniques to students. What language would you use to describe The Three Planes of Movement? The Three Intensity Levels? How would you encourage students to follow their body’s way as you share this information?

Next, practice describing the fitness and conditioning benefits of Principle 7: Three Planes of Movement and Intensity Levels. Imagine a student asking, “Why do we do this?” How would you answer this question?

As you become more familiar with Principle 7, cues for the Three Planes of Movement and Intensity Levels will begin to flow from you naturally as you teach (regardless of the focus or routine). Remember: less is often more.

When you feel ready, focus on Principle 7: Three Planes of Movement and Intensity Levels in class. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Focus on sensing The Three Planes of Movement
- Focus on sensing the Smile Line as you shift weight
- Focus on sensing The Three Intensity Levels