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STARHEALTH

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Work out to the rhythm



James Nielsen photos / Houston Chronicle

By Brooke A. Lewis

ONE hundred and ninety-eight pounds. Jenny Mayants remembers staring at that number on the scale and reaching her breaking point. It was 2012, and the senior at Texas Tech was supposed to be on top of world, finishing her degree and preparing to start a fresh professional life. But there it was in front her, a reminder of what had changed: 198. “It really took a lot for me to come to the realization that this is not me,” she said.

Mayants had grown up dancing, learning every step from samba to rumba, jazz to hip-hop, even ballet. She didn’t have to worry about keeping in shape. Dance did that for her. But she didn’t dance after enrolling at Texas Tech. Mayants threw herself into school, joining clubs and a sorority. After going through a devastating break-up during her junior year, she gained nearly 50 pounds in just a year-and-a-half. “I will never be the thin, small girl, but I can be healthy, strong and curvy,” Mayants said. That’s what she wanted to get back to.

Four years later, Mayants is standing in a dance studio near Minute Maid Park. The 198-pound senior at Texas Tech is gone. Now 26 and 50 pounds lighter, Mayants is dancing again. Her tanned hips are shaking, her long and wavy black hair flips back and forth, and her smile is flashing at the dance students following her lead. Mayants didn’t just start dancing to get back in shape, she started her own dance program to help other people exercise away a number that frightens them. Her Dance House Fitness, which combines cardio and choreography

to hip-hop music, started in April. It’s geared toward students who don’t have any dance experience, which Mayants says sets it apart from other dance programs in the area. The classes alternate every Sunday between a 90-minute choreography course and an intense, 60-minute dance cardio workout. “The atmosphere I’m trying to create is ‘come here and unleash it. Just let go and have fun.’ There’s no judgment,” she said. Mayants has seen a steady stream of clients since her first class in April. However, many of them already felt like they knew Mayants

HEALTH
ZONE

Dance House Fitness owner and lead dance instructor Jenny Mayants, above center, leads a hip-hop dance class at Dance House Fitness, which combines cardio and choreography. At top, Emily Volke becomes one with the music during a hip-hop dance class. The classes are geared toward students without dance experience.

UNZIPPED

77005, a tony municipality where the city’s doctors and lawyers live

By Maggie Gordon

Earlier this month, the Chronicle published a report that named West University the state’s wealthiest town. Hugged by Houston, West U, which, makes up the 77005 ZIP code, is its own municipality within the 610 Loop, and it’s vastly different than Houston and the rest of the country. While about 1 percent of American adults work in legal professions, West University’s 77005 ZIP code is a hotbed for legal workers, with 11 percent of the area’s workforce claiming jobs in this field. The national legal workforce includes a wide variety of actual job titles — everything from paralegals to partners at white-shoe firms — but salaries in West U point to more of the latter. On average, legal workers across the country earn \$74,408 a year, according to the Census, just a small percentage of the average \$205,917 West U legal workers rake in per year. Doctors? They’ve got those,

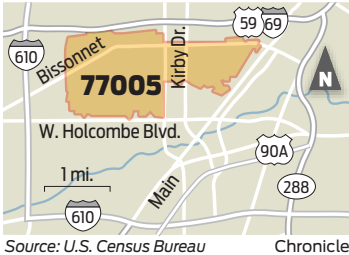


Houston Chronicle

Houses on Tangleby street in West University Place.

too. Fourteen percent of West U workers are in medical professions, compared with 6 percent nationwide, and the West U health care workers earn more than double the national average, which means more doctors and fewer nurses.

77005 continues on D3



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Chronicle

‘Brain training’ treatment for anxiety awaiting acceptance

By David Kaplan

At his private clinic near Greenway Plaza, Steve Cochran practices one of the most promising therapies you’ve likely never heard of. He specializes in neurofeedback, a technique designed to make a person calmer and more focused. Clients, who fly in from as far as California, come to the Neurotherapy Center of Houston with anxiety, depression, attention disorders and more. Cochran and other practitioners in Houston and around the world report dramatic benefits from the decades-old treatment, but neurofeedback has remained under the radar. It hasn’t achieved wider acceptance for a variety of reasons. Insurers typically don’t cover it, and the medical community generally ignores the field or is skeptical. Another challenge is that it is hard to explain how neurofeedback works. It may sound weird

when first described — as a way to treat a malady by non-consciously guiding your brain in a desired direction using electrodes and computer software. In the first session, a client receives an EEG “brain map,” or electroencephalogram, which identifies the location of errant brainwave activity. In subsequent sessions, electrodes are placed on the person’s scalp near the part of the brain that needs regulating. The client then watches a video on computer software that can read brainwave activity. The video stops and starts. By non-consciously regulating his or her brain activity in the desired direction, the client is rewarded by being able to watch the movie with no interruption, Cochran said. “When you are getting feedback from the brain, you can modify it, even if you don’t have conscious awareness” of what is

Treatments continues on D3

Dear Abby: Keep dogs on a leash. PAGE D5

Hints From Heloise: Sounding off on prescription-pill bottles. PAGE D5

STAR

Treatments seen as ‘weird’

Treatments from page D1

taking place, said Cincinnati psychologist Kirk Little, president of the International Society for Neurofeedback and Research in McLean, Va.

Not everyone benefits from neurofeedback, Cochran said, and people who want to get better are the ones more likely to improve.

Cochran's client, Katy resident Caroline Howell, said neurofeedback "did wonders," enabling her to overcome severe depression, but when she tells her friends about it, they say, "If it's so great, why haven't I heard of it?"

Along with a number of psychological conditions, neurofeedback can treat drug and alcohol addiction, brain trauma, impairments from stroke, migraines and epilepsy. It's also used by artists and athletes to enhance performance.

Other therapists in Houston offer neurofeedback, but Cochran's 8-year-old clinic is among the few focused almost exclusively on it.

Neurofeedback is typically not a person's first choice, Cochran said. In many cases "their doctor first prescribed medications that didn't work."

Clients may come in skeptical, he said. "They find it hard to believe you can train parts of the brain just as you can strengthen a muscle."

Neurofeedback is "a word of mouth thing," said Kurt Othmer, president of EEG Info, a neurofeedback clinic in Woodland Hills, Calif. "Someone you trust tried it and got good results." But it also has numerous advocates in the medical community.

In his book on neurofeedback, "A Symphony in the Brain," science writer Jim Robbins writes that neurofeedback "has vast untapped potential for millions of people," and is "safer than most prescription medicines," but in need of more research to be better understood.

Riding the waves

Neurofeedback operates on the principle that the brain can be trained to modify its own settings.

During a neurofeedback session, clients focus on a particular brainwave band-

width, each of which has a separate function. The lowest brainwave bandwidth, delta, is dominant during deep sleep; the theta range is active during the fuzzy state between sleeping and waking.

Alpha waves are dominant in a state of well-being and calm, which can be achieved through meditation or neurofeedback, said Bob Dickson, the former executive director of the Southwest Health Technology Foundation.

The beta range is dominant when a person is alert, executing a task and in a thinking mode, Cochran said. High beta, however, signals an anxious state in which neurofeedback can be useful, he said. The goal of neurofeedback in the high beta state is to reduce brain wave activity.

The principle is nothing new. One of the earliest milestones in neurofeedback research came in 1958, when University of Chicago psychologist Joe Kamiya trained graduate students to enter the alpha state with electrodes and verbal prompts, as Robbins wrote.

In the 1970s, people used neurofeedback — also called biofeedback — to reach blissful alpha states, and the field suffered from the reputation that it was something to do to get high, Cochran said.

It still isn't widely endorsed by the medical community. Among the skeptics is Russell Barkley, clinical professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at the Medical University of South Carolina, who has treated ADHD for 40 years and published hundreds of articles on the subject.

"Claims about biofeedback have far outstripped the supporting evidence," he said. Positive results from neurofeedback can be attributed to the placebo effect, he maintained, and it doesn't hold up when subjected to the most rigorous testing — a double-blind or control group study in which a person doesn't know if he is doing an actual or sham neurofeedback session.

Neurofeedback doesn't need double-blind studies



Carol Kaliff

Funding for neurofeedback research has increased in recent years and technology for practitioners has become more affordable.

to demonstrate its effectiveness — other less-expensive types of studies are valid, Little argues.

Just in the past three years, more than 500 peer-reviewed neurofeedback research studies have been published, he said. And the clients who've seen benefits from neurofeedback don't doubt that the technique really works.

Patient feedback

Cochran has a quiet presence and a calm, gentle voice. The son of Houston psychiatrists, the clinical social worker received neurofeedback training from psychologist Eugenia Bodenhamer-Davis at the University of North Texas. He first began practicing neurofeedback in 2007.

Natalie Delgadillo first came to Cochran's clinic reluctantly, thinking, "This is some stupid hippie mumbo-jumbo." Her mother made her go.

She was 18, and her attention disorder was causing severe anxiety. She chain-smoked, rarely slept and was "kind of all over the place." A drug she took for ADHD made her "like a caged animal," her mother, Elizabeth Soto, recalled.

Cochran weaned her off the drug, and after five or six sessions of neurofeedback, "I could see a calmness come over her," her mother said.

Neurofeedback at Cochran's clinic generally requires 30 to 40 visits; he charges \$100 per visit.

Delgadillo, who first

weird ... far out," she said.

Her practice was initially focused on marriage and family counseling, and she still offers that, but her Galleria-area clinic, Unique Mindcare, now has a strong emphasis on brain-related treatments including neurofeedback and Nexalin, a non-invasive brain stimulation which, she says, works to balance brain chemistry when treating depression, anxiety and sleeplessness. (The neurofeedback society does not promote specific products, including Nexalin.)

One of her clients, a 16-year-old boy, had been diagnosed with a neurological autoimmune illness at age 10. Medicine improved his condition, but he had been left with residual symptoms, including ADD, OCD, anxiety and "brain fog" which, he said, made it hard to think clearly. After a year's worth of intensive neurofeedback and Nexalin, his ADD, anxiety and brain fog were eliminated by about 99 percent, he said.

"It's made a remarkable difference in my life," said the teen, who asked

to remain anonymous. He currently goes in for treatment when needed, about once every six months.

Tipping point

Little is optimistic that neurofeedback is on the verge of gaining wide acceptance; he believes it's reached its "tipping point," partly because funding for neurofeedback research has increased significantly in recent years and computer technology has become more affordable for practitioners.

In October, Little's group, the International Society for Neurofeedback and Research, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry will team up to make a presentation to the American Medical Association, requesting that neurofeedback be formally recognized as a legitimate and valid procedure.

If that happens, he said, insurers will be more likely to cover the treatment.

David Kaplan is a former business writer for the Houston Chronicle.

77005 is state's richest ZIP code

77005 from page D1

So what are all these doctors and lawyers doing with their salaries? More than 66 percent of families in the 77005 ZIP code send their high schoolers to private school, compared with 9.4 percent nationally and 7.1 percent of Houstonians.

And a quick drive through the neighborhood will tell you they're buying bigger houses than typical American families. And the homes are older, too. About one in five homes in the 77005 ZIP code were built before 1939 — positively ancient for Houston — compared with about one in eight nationally.

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