

Healthy family

NEWS EVERYONE NEEDS TO STAY WELL

The Path of Peace

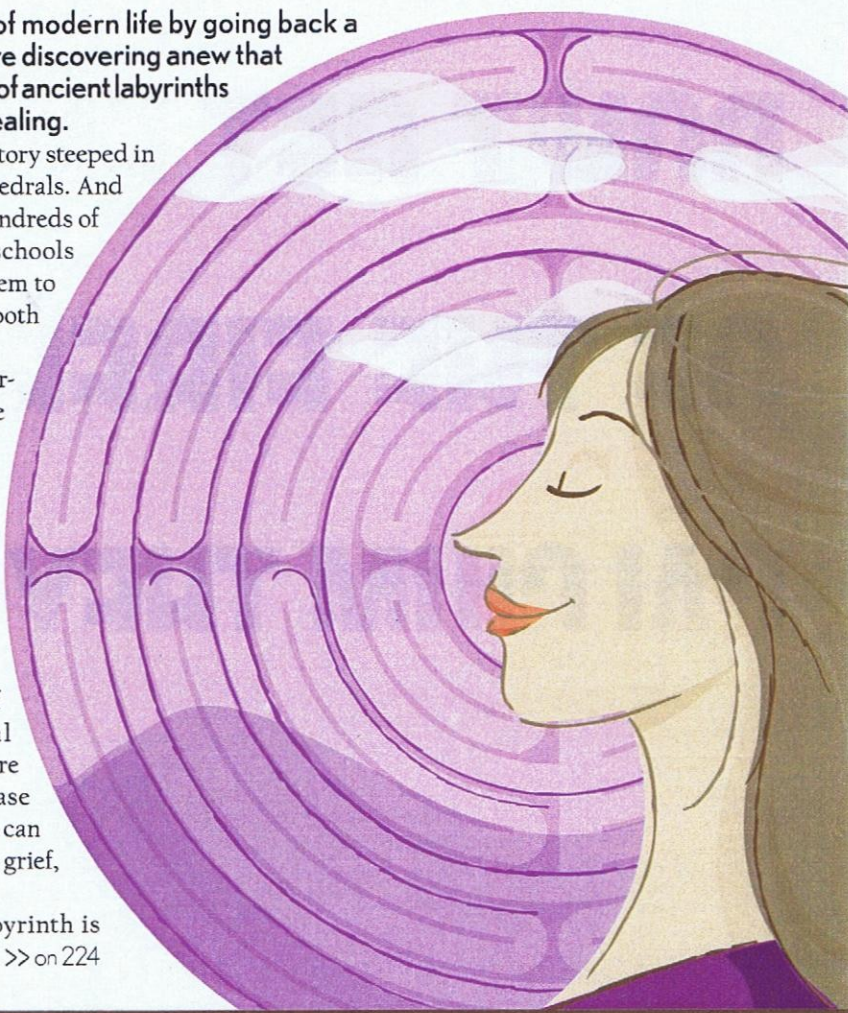
Take a break from the stress of modern life by going back a few thousand years. People are discovering anew that walking the concentric circles of ancient labyrinths can create inner peace and healing.

Labyrinths are paths with a history steeped in Greek traditions and Gothic cathedrals. And they're undergoing a revival as hundreds of hospitals, hospices, spas, and schools across the country have added them to their grounds to help people find both spiritual and physical health.

Unlike a maze, a labyrinth's purpose isn't to make people lost. Quite the opposite, as it guides them through a winding pathway toward a central place of discovery and reflection.

Walking a labyrinth is "highly effective for reducing anxiety and producing what's called the relaxation response," says Dr. Herbert Benson, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. It can lower blood pressure and breathing rates, and decrease chronic pain. Labyrinth walking can also help with conflict resolution, grief, and depression.

One of the beauties of the labyrinth is that it combines meditation with >> on 224



LIBRARY FINDS Some of the best information at your local library isn't in a book—it's in the person sitting at the main desk. Recent research from the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center showed that cancer patients looking for useful and accurate information on the Internet were much more likely to find it if they enlisted the help of a librarian. Only 4 percent of the patients surveyed said they were able to find all the same information on their own. While this study looked at cancer information, the results pertain to any health concern.

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CLUBS FOR SPORTY SORTS

Wish you had friends who shared your active lifestyle?

Just join the club. Any club.

And the good news is you don't have to spend a small fortune on fancy memberships. There are many not-for-profit groups whose interests likely coincide with yours. For example, the Swiss Ski Club of New York (swisskiclub.com) was founded in 1939 by 21 friends who wanted to celebrate their Swiss heritage. When skiing became much more popular in the 1940s, the group evolved into a ski club with members of many different nationalities, and now has a chalet-style log house in Vermont that can accommodate up to 42 people in dorm-style rooms.

The Sierra Club (sierraclub.org, 415/977-5500) operates several alpine lodges and huts in California, including Clair Tappaan Lodge near Lake Tahoe resorts. The Sierra Club also organizes a variety of hiking and wilderness expeditions through chapters around the country.

Is smacking a tennis ball more your thing? Community tennis clubs and associations can usually offer more tennis times at lower prices than traditional health clubs or country clubs. And it's a great way to meet nearby friends because you'll often play with people right from your own neighborhood.

The United States Tennis Association maintains a list of such associations at network.usta.com.

Also make sure to check with the front offices at local elementary schools, high schools, and community centers to see what activities they host on their premises. You may be surprised to find an extensive array of clubs for badminton, martial arts, yoga, pickup basketball, aerobics, and the like. ELISA WILLIAMS

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exercise. Sitting meditation can cause discomfort, especially for older people.

Marge McCarthy, president of the Labyrinth Resource Group, has helped put labyrinths in 10 elementary schools in Santa Fe. "I think the reason kids take to it is our society is so frantic," she says. "Most of them don't have time to be with themselves. Kids are feeling tremendous pressure. They have to achieve, go to college, be popular. It's a tough time."

Pace is personal, but most people stroll slowly through the corridors of the geometric design until they reach the center, a place of meditation and great power, says the Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress, an Episcopal canon at Grace Cathedral Church in San Francisco, and author of *Walking the Sacred Path*.

"The circle was seen as a healing element in cultures all over the world," says Artress, who discovered the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth in 1991 hidden under rows of chairs. Built in France around 1201, it's believed to be the oldest existing labyrinth of medieval design (the style shown on page 222).

Artress stresses that there's no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth—simply do what feels right. If it's helpful, you can view the walk in three stages: a releasing stage on the way in, a time of reflection in the center, and a gentle return to the real world on the way out in which you absorb the lessons learned in the previous two stages. "The labyrinth allows you space and time to decide what you need to do and get in touch with yourself," Artress says.

More than 2,000 labyrinths around the country are open to the public. To find nearby labyrinths, or to learn more about these fascinating and storied structures, go to labyrinthociety.org. KATHLEEN PARRISH

GOOD TO KNOW

AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Finger labyrinths offer many of the same benefits as walking labyrinths, using your fingers rather than your feet. Labyrinth designs are traced in wood on these pint-size models—you simply trace the design with your fingertip. Find them on the Internet at sites such as relax4life.com or at stores that specialize in spiritual or religious items.



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