A growing number of young people are looking for ways to feel more at home inside their bodies. This has triggered a new surge of interest in exploring both ancient Eastern disciplines and newer Western methods of working with the body. These systems are often grouped under the umbrella term of “sensory awareness”—the process of tuning into the body’s needs and sensations.

As many experts tell us, emotions, attitudes and past experiences are all linked to physical responses in the body. Often, we ignore these body messages until serious illness or breakdown occurs. It’s as if the body and the mind were tied together by a fragile cord and slowly wandering in opposite directions. Eventually, the body yanks on that cord with a sharp dose of pain or disease to finally grab the mind’s attention. Sensory awareness systems aim to avoid these crisis messages by keeping mind and body in constant communication. The idea is to help the body put through a continuous flow of signals about its need for food, rest and exercise—while the mind sends back its own signals to control the body’s functions and stir up new reserves of strength and energy.

Because the vast majority of these methods are rooted in centuries-old Chinese, Japanese and Indian philosophies, the same basic techniques tend to surface again and again. For instance, deep breathing, stretching exercises and mental concentration to relax various body parts are techniques used in dozens of body systems. Overall, these systems tend to fall into several distinct categories of body-working methods—from massage to martial arts. Here’s a micro-view of some of the most popular approaches to bringing mind and body back together:

**Movement**

**Bioenergetics.** Alexander Lowen based his bioenergetics system on the theories of psycholo-
gist Wilhelm Reich. Reich believed that in growing up each person develops a “character armor” of past experiences which are reflected in his postures and movements. This means that past traumas and frustrations remain locked up in the body, preventing free and easy movement. Lowen de-
veloped a series of exercises to break down this character armor. For example, arching the body in forward and backward bows is used to bring new awareness of sensations, while deep breathing and body tremors release tension. Lowen also used a series of sharp, active movements such as striking a bed or couch and kicking or flailing with the arms. These actions help the person recall his childhood ability to abandon himself to movement and release emotions physically instead of keeping them bottled up inside.

Since Lowen first developed his methods, the term bioenergetics has been broadened to include a variety of approaches, from movement by the individual to manipulation of the body by a trainer or healer. How-
ever, the major goal remains the same—to unfurl tensions and patterns of behavior which interfere with the free, open use of the body.

**FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION.** This move-
ment system, invented by physical Meshul Felden-
krass, concentrates on controlling body functions and alleviating stress.

**Most of the exercises are performed laying down.** A student typically begins his session by checking every part of his body touch the floor. From here, exercises are done slowly, with no straining or effort. Some movements are performed totally inside the mind, like a mental rehearsal of activity. Those who have had the method report heightened awareness of body functions and elimi-
nation of stiff, tight muscles. It’s also possible to relax a lot of your anxiety about future events by using the technique of mentally performing them ahead of time.

**YOGA.** Yoga, a Hindu discipline which dates back to prehistoric times, is probably the world’s oldest system of physical and mental development.