

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.

MORE HEALTHY FAMILY >> on 224

THE PATH OF PEACE >> from 222

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 labyrinthsonline.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.



MORE HEALTHY FAMILY >> on 226