

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

### Essentrics, Classical Stretch, and Breast Cancer Rehabilitation

By Amanda Sterczyk

Breast cancer surgery is devastating to a woman, both emotionally and physically. Post-surgery, women experience limited range of motion and painful, stiff, and weak muscles in the shoulder, arm, and chest wall of the affected side. Lymphedema [swelling of the arm] can occur if lymph nodes were involved in the surgery. The lymphatic system drains fluid from tissues throughout the body and allows immune cells to travel where they are needed.

Women who have had breast cancer surgery and radiation need to raise their arms above their heads every day for the rest of their lives to drain any blocked lymph fluid and prevent the possibility of lymphedema. Classical Stretch - the #1 fitness show on PBS - is one of the few fitness programs that focuses on working the arms above the head.

An arm hangs from the shoulder downwards, so the fluid cannot escape if the pumping stations are damaged or removed. Lymph fluids will 'stagnate', causing swelling and lymphedema. When the arm is raised above the head, the force of gravity helps the fluids to run downwards, like a drain.

Miranda Esmonde-White, a former ballet dancer, created Classical Stretch 15 years ago. Classical Stretch, a full body stretching and strengthening workout, is a combination of scientific principles of stretching and graceful movements that unlock uncomfortably rigid joints while simultaneously stretching and strengthening the muscles. It works by using the muscles to 'pull the joints apart' while simultaneously moving in the 'pulled apart' positions. This challenging of lengthened muscles develops them to become stronger, leaner, and more flexible.

After her own breast cancer surgery, Miranda used exercises from her physical therapist, along with sequences she had created in Classical Stretch to rebuild damaged muscles under her affected arm and regain full range of motion. She created a breast cancer rehabilitation exercise program available free of charge for anyone who needs it. Visit [breastcancerrehabilitation.com](http://breastcancerrehabilitation.com) to follow a video of these exercises. There is also a 15-minute stress release workout available on the website.

The Essentrics Workout is the live version of Classical Stretch. I am the only certified Essentrics Instructor in Ottawa, and I live and teach in Old Ottawa South. I have taught men, women, and children of all ages and created "Classroom Stretch", a popular school-based program that I introduced to half a dozen schools in the Ottawa area. Students practicing Classroom Stretch at Hopewell School were featured on the CBC in



Amanda Sterczyk of Classical Stretch and Chris Drumm of Fred Astaire Dance Studio.

PHOTO BY KERRI WOODS

2012. I was a fitness leader for the 2014 Bust a Move for Breast Health event, where I kicked off the day with an Essentrics Workout.

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People who follow the Classical Stretch TV show, and take Essentrics classes, will confirm that the results come quickly - not over years, but in a matter of minutes. Increased flexibility is enjoyed instantly. The results of following Classical Stretch and Essentrics leave you with improved posture, increased energy, the relief of aches and pains, and a general feeling of well-being. It is well known to increase the rate of healing from injuries and chronic conditions such as back pain, osteoporosis, and osteoarthritis.

Sylvie, who had breast cancer surgery with lymph nodes removed, has been in my Essentrics classes for 7 months and has noticed an improvement in arm strength and range of motion since joining the weekly class. She credits the gentle, yet strengthening, aspect of the Essentrics Workout.

Essentrics & Classical Stretch is for all ages and both sexes. The moves are slow enough for everyone to follow, and challenging enough for

everyone to be able to work to their personal limits. It is a non-intimidating fitness program that is easy enough to help motivate beginners, but challenging enough to work for athletes. Essentrics/Classical Stretch is the ideal program to help combat the health problems created by the sedentary and stressful lifestyles of the 21st Century. It is fun, it is modern, it is intelligent, and it works!

For more information on classes, visit my website ([essentricsottawa.com](http://essentricsottawa.com)), 'like' my Facebook page ([facebook.com/ClassicalStretchOttawa](https://www.facebook.com/ClassicalStretchOttawa)), follow me on Twitter (@[#essentricsottawa](https://twitter.com/essentricsottawa) #[#stretchwithamanda](https://twitter.com/stretchwithamanda) #[#essentricso](https://twitter.com/essentricsottawa)), or email me directly ([essentricsottawa@gmail.com](mailto:essentricsottawa@gmail.com)).

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