

# A GUIDE TO YOGA



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## **An All-Around Yoga Exercise: 12-Step Salute to the Sun**

One of the all-around yoga exercises is the 12-step salute to the sun. Do it once or twice when you get up in the morning to help relieve stiffness and invigorate the body. Multiple repetitions at night will help you to relax; insomniacs often find that six to 12 rounds help them fall asleep.

1. Stand with your feet slightly apart, palms together, thumbs against your chest.
2. Inhale deeply while slowly raising your hands over your head, and bend back as far as possible, while tightening your buttocks. Hold for three seconds.
3. Slowly exhale and bend forward, keeping your knees straight, until your fingers touch the floor outside your feet. (If you can't touch the floor, go as close as you can.) Bring your head in toward your knees.
4. Slowly inhale, bend your knees, and if your fingertips aren't outside your feet on the floor, place them there. Slide your right foot back as far as you can go, with the right knee an inch or so off the floor, (a lunge position). Now look up as high as possible, arching your back.
5. Before exhaling again, slide your left foot back until it is beside the right one, and with your weight supported on your palms and toes, straighten both legs so that your body forms a flat plane. Make sure your stomach is pulled in.
6. Slowly exhale, bend both knees to the floor, bend with your hips in the air, lower your chest and forehead to the floor.
7. Now inhale slowly and look up, bending your head back, then raising it, followed by your upper chest, then lower chest. Your lower body - from the navel down - should be on the floor, and your elbows should be slightly bent. Hold for three to five seconds.
8. Exhale slowly and raise your hips until your feet and palms are flat on the floor and your arms and legs are straight in an inverted V position.
9. Inhale slowly and bring your right foot forward as in position 4. The foot should be flat on the floor between your fingertips. The left leg should be almost straight behind you, with its knee slightly off the floor. Raise your head, look up, and arch your back.
10. Slowly exhale and bring your left foot forward next to your right one. Straighten your legs and stand, trying to keep your fingertips on the floor, and try to touch your head to your knees as in position 9.
11. Slowly inhale, raise your arms up and stretch back as in position 2. Don't forget to tighten your buttocks. Hold for three seconds.
12. Slowly exhale, lowering your arms to your sides. Relax. Repeat the series.

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### **Applications in Cancer Treatment**

A cure for cancer exists through the use of yoga, a San Antonio, Texas, cancer specialist said during a seminar in Oklahoma City in the 1980s.

But physicians refused to acknowledge the cure, said Col. Hansa Raval, M.D., a pathologist with the United States Army. Dr. Raval said her work in cytotechnology \_ a diagnostic branch of medicine designed to pinpoint early stages of cancer \_ was fruitless until she began researching the use of non-conventional methods of treatment.

The specialist said she witnessed the use of Raja yoga and meditation cure crippling arthritis, headaches and even cancer.

And even though Raval offers proof, which she said was collected during two years of study at the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University in India, she has been dismissed by other members of the medical profession as a kook.

Yoga's success as a treatment method is due to another hypothesis Raval proposes that 98 percent of all cancer is psychosomatic.

This is not chanting or mantra reciting, the physician said. It's not based on scriptures. It's not a cult. It's not biofeedback. It's deeper than that. This is a full-proof method of meditation, a detailed understanding of what the soul is.

Raval maintains that medical schools belittle the study of non-conventional methods of cancer treatment in favor of conventional methods such as radiation, chemotherapy, and treatment through machines.'

Medical schools teach students that the human being is only a body. But the mind has the power to cure the body. By definition, psychosomatic means a combination of mind, or soul and body.

The soul creates the disease, but the body suffers. If the psyche creates the disease, the only way to cure it is through the psyche. It's a very simple formula: treating the seed of the problem.

Further, studies in parapsychology all point to the treatment of illness through treatment of the soul.

The World Spiritual University, which has branches in 30 countries, teaches peace and perfection for health and happiness through the use of Raja yoga. The university gained status as a non-governmental

member of the United Nations and has offices at the U.N. building in New York.

Raja yoga teaches students to search their soul world for answers on where they came from and why the cancer entered their body. They learn what role religion, stress, family and lifestyle played in the cancer.

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## **Astanga Vinyasa Yoga**

Astanga, or sometimes spelled ashtanga Yoga is actually taught today by a man named Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, in Mysore, India. He has brought astanga yoga to the west about 25 years ago and still teaches today at 91 years of age. Astanga yoga began with the rediscovery of the ancient manuscript Yoga Korunta. It describes a unique system of Hatha yoga as practiced and created by the ancient sage Vamana Rishi. It is believed to be the original asana practiced intended by Patanjali.

The Yoga Korunta emphasizes vinyasa, or breath-synchronized movement, where one practices a posture with specific breathing patterns associated with it. This breathing technique is called ujjayi pranayama, or the victorious breath, and it is a process that produces intense internal heat and a profuse sweat that purifies and detoxifies the muscles and organs. This also releases beneficial hormones and nutrients, and is usually massaged back into the body. The breath ensures efficient circulation of blood. The result is improved circulation, a light and strong body and a calm mind.

There is a proper sequence to follow when practicing Astanga yoga. One must graduate from one sequence of postures to move onto the next. The Primary Series (Yoga Chikitsa) detoxifies and aligns the body, purifying it so that toxins do not block. The Intermediate Series (Nadi Shodhana) purifies the nervous system by opening and clearing the energy channels, allowing energy to pass through easily. The Advanced Series A, B, C, and D (Sthira Bhaga) integrate the grace and stamina of the practice, which calls for intense flexibility.

It is best to find a trained and knowledgeable teacher to assist you through this discipline. It is an intense practice that is rigorous, six days a week. You are guaranteed to find inner peace and fulfillment with each breath you take.

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### **Basic Sitting Postures with Benefits**

JANU SIRSASANA: Correct foot placement

Sit up straight with legs evenly extended in front. Bend the right leg at the knee and place the foot so that the heel is in the right groin and the front of the foot touches the left thigh. Turn the foot so that the bottom of the foot is facing upward and press the knee back to form an obtuse angle with the body. This position will be difficult at first; don't force it. Put a folded blanket under the knee and also under the hips. Gradually the knee will move farther back. Just keep the foot correctly positioned.

JANU SIRSASANA: Correct, perfect posture

Having positioned the foot and knee correctly, stretch the left leg out, keeping the leg firmly on the mat. Settle the heel firmly and stretch the toes up. (The heel should pull gently away from the ankle.) Now inhale and bend forward over the straight leg, catching the foot with both hands if possible. Beginners should bend only as far as they can without rounding the back. When this posture is done correctly and completely, the body will roll forward over the extended leg, absolutely flat from the tail bone to the head. Stay there breathing normally for as long as you can. Inhale, release the handhold, come up smoothly, straighten the bent leg and relax. Repeat on other side.

JANU SIRSASANA: Wrong posture

The heel is not positioned against its own thigh. The knee has not been pushed back as far as possible to form an obtuse angle. The back is humped and curved because the pelvis is jammed and unable to lift properly. Instead of a smooth, complete stretching of the spine, the lumbar is over-stretched and the rest of the spine constricted. The left leg is not flat on the floor.

TRIANG MUKHAIPADA PASCHIMOTTANASANA: Sitting, forward-bending pose over one leg

This posture generally follows the previous one. Sit with your legs stretched in front. Bend the right leg so that the right foot is near the right hip. The toes should point back. The right calf presses against the right thigh. The body will tilt in this position so put a small folded towel under the left buttock to keep the hips level and the forward stretch even and extended. Hold the left foot with both hands, inhale and bend forward, keeping both knees together as you stretch forward over the straight leg. Many students will find it difficult in this position to even take hold of the foot of the outstretched leg. Do not despair. Just hold the knee, shin or ankle, and sit, breathing deeply, in whichever position represents your best extension. If the back is tight and the spine inflexible, this will take time. Release the hold and straighten the bent leg. Repeat on the other side.

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### **Basic Yoga Postures and their Variations**

1. **THE COBRA** Do this in easy stages. Lie down, face prone, legs tightly together and stretched back, forehead on the floor. Put your hands, palm down, just under your shoulders. Inhale and raise your head, pressing your neck back, now use your hands to push your trunk up until you are bending in a beautiful arc from your lower spine to the back of your neck. You need go no further than this. However, if you are supple enough, you can now straighten your arms completely, bend the legs at the knees and drop your head back to touch your feet. Even if your head goes nowhere near your feet, drop it back as far as possible and hold the posture with deep breathing. Come out of the posture very slowly, returning to the face prone posture. Relax with your head to one side. Repeat.
2. **THE BOW** This is also an extreme version of the simple bow. It is surprising how many children can do it immediately. Take it, once again, in easy stages. Lie face prone on your mat. If you are very slim have a nice thick, padded mat for this one. Inhale and bend your knees up. Stretch back with your arms and catch hold of your ankles, keeping fingers and thumbs all together on the outside. Inhale and at the same time raise your head and chest, pulling at your ankles and lifting knees and thighs off the floor. Breathe normally, trying to kick up your legs higher and lifting your head up. You are now bent like a bow, balancing the weight of your body on your abdomen. You can stop right here but if you can still stretch further, then slide your hands down your legs, lift them higher, keep the knees together and pull back as much as you can. Hold for a few normal deep breaths, then relax back to the face-prone position, head to one side.
3. **THE SHOOTING BOW** In Sanskrit this is known as Akarna Dhanurasana and one leg is drawn up like a shooting bow. Sit with both legs stretched out in front and back straight. Reach forward with both hands and clasp your feet, catching the right foot with the left hand and the left foot with the right hand. Inhale, bend the left knee and pull the foot across the body, close to your chest, pointing the elbow up and twisting the body slightly to the right. The left hand stays firm and tight, holding the right foot. Hold posture with normal breathing, release slowly, and relax. Repeat on other side. In the beginning it is enough to hold the bent left leg with the right hand. When this is easy, stretch down and hold the left foot with the right hand. Continue to pull on the left foot, lifting it higher on each exhalation.

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### **Beginners' Yoga Video Offers Good Instruction**

Trying to find well-produced fitness videos that are truly suitable for beginners can be a daunting challenge.

Most tapes these days aim at intermediate exercisers, the ones who know a grapevine from a box step and a lateral raise from a biceps curl. These tapes may offer a few easier moves here and there, but the instruction clearly is geared to people who already know what to do.

The few tapes that are marketed for beginners often are unspeakably repetitive, as if flabby muscles always mean a flabby brain. And too often, they provide no way to add extra challenge or difficulty to the routine, as if beginning exercisers are going to remain beginners forever.

It's nice, then, to discover Yoga Zone: Flexibility and Tone, a beginners' tape that offers the depth of instruction and easy pace that true beginners need.

The instructor here is Alan Finger, a genial-looking middle-aged man who wears a polo shirt, rolled-up cotton pants and a chin-length bob. His physique is not the standard chiseled form of exercise videos; he looks as if he might carry a few extra pounds around the middle.

But he has a lovely voice (with a hint of a brogue) and a calm manner, two essentials for a yoga tape, where relaxation is key.

And he has a true gift for instruction, combining the nuts-and-bolts details of positioning with what it feels like to stretch and balance.

When he describes how the muscles of the feet ought to rotate through to the little toe, you'll know -- and be able to feel -- just what he's talking about.

But each move contains so many of these instructions that it can be a little overwhelming to try to master all of them at once.

If you have tried yoga before, you'll recognize some of them -- the down-on-all-fours stretch called the cat, the inverted V that forms the down dog, and the corpse, which requires little more than lying flat on one's back, completely relaxed.

In another nod to beginners, Finger also provides true modifications and tips for those who may not be as flexible as they'd like.

Finger shows how a folded blanket can be placed under the knees or for better support while performing seated postures. A folded towel also is used for several poses, although Finger doesn't announce that in advance.

The 50-minute session ends with stretching and relaxation, set to gentle New Age music that might lull you to sleep.

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### **Breathing and Relaxing**

You don't need to fall into the stress mode of life. You can use breath to relax, rather than stress, your mind and body. Yoga helps you to relearn that natural state that your body and mind want to be in: relaxation.

Deep breathing is both calming and energizing. The energy you feel from a few minutes of careful breathe is not nervous or hyper, but that calm, steady energy we all need. Slow, steady, and quiet breathing gives a message to your nervous system: Be calm.

Whole books have been written on yoga breathing. Here is one 5-minute Breath Break. (Read through the instructions several times before you try the practice.)

1. Sit with your spine as straight as possible. Use a chair if necessary but don't slump into it. Feet flat on the floor with knees directly over the center of your feet. Use a book or cushion under your feet if they do not rest comfortably on the floor. Hands are on the tops of your legs.
2. Close your eyes gently and let them rest behind closed lids.
3. Think about your ribs, at the front, back, and at the sides of your body. Your lungs are behind those ribs.
4. Feel your lungs filling up, your ribs expanding out and up. Feel your lungs emptying, your ribs coming back down and in. Don't push the breath.
5. The first few times you do this, do it for 2 to 3 minutes, then do it for up to 5 to 10 minutes. At first, set aside a time at least once a day to do this. When you learn how good it makes you feel, you'll want to do it at other times as well.

Just as one stressful situation goes into your next challenge, relaxing for a few minutes every day gradually carries over into the rest of your daily life and activities.

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#### **The Seven Chakras**

Chakra is a Sanskrit word meaning spinning wheel. These are a system of seven energy centers located along the spine. Each chakra corresponds to an area of the body, a set of behavioral characteristics and stages of spiritual growth. Practicing yoga and focusing your energies during different postures can help you to align your chakras and get all the wheels spinning in the same direction and speed.

Understanding how to fine tune and control your chakras through yoga and meditation can help bring balance and peace to your mind, body and spirit.

There are seven chakras, each associated with a different part of the body along the spine from the perineum to the crown of your head. Each chakra is associated with a particular body location, a color, a central emotional/behavioral issue, as well as many other personal aspects including identity, goals, rights, etc.

The seven chakras are: Muladhara- base of the spine; Svadhisthana- abdomen, genitals, lower back/hip; Manipura- solar plexus; Anahata- heart area; Visshudha- throat; Ajna- brow; Sahasrara- top of head, cerebral cortex.

Through the movements and postures of yoga, you can learn to focus your concentration and energy to and from the various chakras in your body. This can allow you to compensate for areas that may be out of synch with the rest of your body or not active at all. By balancing the energy among all seven of the chakras, balance can be achieved. This spiritual energy is known as Kundalini energy. In its dormant state, it can be visualized as a coiled up snake resting at the base of your spine, the Muladhara chakra. Since the chakras act as valves or pumps regulating the flow of energy through your system, controlled and purposeful movements such as yoga can be extremely beneficial in realigning your chakras in a way that can cause great benefits to you in your physical and emotional wellbeing.

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#### **Cure for Asthma**

Yoga breathing exercises could help sufferers of mild asthma and may help reduce their use of low-dose drug inhalers in wheezing attacks.

Researchers from the Respiratory Medicine Unit, City University, Nottingham, call for more studies of

ways of improving breathing control which they say have been largely ignored by Western medicine.

While yoga practitioners have long believed in the benefits of pranayama breathing exercises for asthmatics, this has been hard to study formally. But, using a Pink City lung - a device that imposes slow breathing on the user and can mimic pranayama breathing exercises - it was possible to measure the effects of controlled breathing in a hospital trial.

Two simulated pranayama exercises were tested: slow deep breathing and breathing out for twice as long as breathing in.

In asthma, the airways become restricted making breathing difficult. It is increasing in the UK, with more than three million children and adults affected, and are responsible for 2,000 deaths annually.

The doctors used standard clinical tests to measure the volume of air patients were able to blow out in a second and to test the irritability of their airways. After yoga, their airways were two times less irritable,

Though asthma patients should not stop their medication, they should experiment with breathing exercises.

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## **Cure for Modern Day Stresses**

Yoga is a 3,000-year-old, Hindu discipline of mind and body that became known in Western society with the hippie generation of the Sixties and early Seventies. Its image as a mystic practice is disappearing as fast as the stressful aspects of the Eighties are appearing.

As an effective method of stress management, yoga is spreading into the business world, the helping professions, nursing and old age homes, and is used in the treatment of alcoholics, hyperactive children and youngsters with learning disabilities. Yoga centers are getting stiff competition from adult education classes of community colleges, boards of education and parks and recreation departments.

The meaning of yoga is union of the body, mind and spirit with truth. There are many kinds of yoga to study, and there can be endless years of practice for the willing student.

Hatha Yoga is among the most popular forms in the west. It emphasizes the practice of postures, which stretch and strengthen the body, help develop a sense of balance and flexibility, as well as body awareness and mental concentration. All forms of yoga incorporate the practice of proper breathing techniques for relaxation, to rest the mind from its constant chatter, to experience an internal calm, and

to energize and purify the body.

As stress levels in society reach new heights, Raja Yoga, the yoga of meditation, is growing in popularity in Western society, while others, such as Kriya Yoga, the yoga of cleansing, and Mantra Yoga, the yoga of chanting, not surprisingly, have little appeal for newcomers.

Stretching and toning, though beneficial, aren't the primary reasons people turn to yoga. Newcomers are hoping that yoga will provide them with a means for handling stress and diffusing tension. The difference between exercise and yoga is that yoga has a meditative quality.

A lot of people are exercising for the psychological benefits and trying many of the Eastern activities, like yoga and tai chi. Yoga seems to have a calming effect on people.

And the techniques work on children as well as adults. When your children are quarreling, ask them to stop what they're doing, raise their arms over their heads, lean forward and breathe deeply to help diffuse their anger. It definitely helps them to cool it.

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## **Cure through Yoga**

Yoga in a popular position Yoga, one of the world's oldest forms of exercise, is experiencing a rebirth in our stressful modern world. You wouldn't think that a 3000-year-old exercise could increase its popularity. But yoga is now being prescribed even by some medical practitioners for a range of health ailments and illnesses, as a stress reliever and to complement other fitness programs.

Talk to anyone who practises yoga and they will quickly extoll an endless list of benefits. It seems beginners quickly become converts. They believe it is the key to good health and happiness in today's world \_ a common goal for most people. But probably the greatest advertisement for yoga is the fact that it seems to have graduated from the weird and alternative ranks into a position of fairly wide community acceptance.

Housewives, businessmen, sportspeople, teenagers and the aged are all practising a variety of yoga positions, meditation and associated breathing exercises. For many, yoga becomes a way of life \_ often giving a more spiritual side to people's lives, although not necessarily linked to religion. One school of belief maintains that chronic and accumulated stress is the reason for many of our modern illnesses.

Proponents of yoga argue that it has a multiplicity of techniques to counter that cause and, unlike drug therapy, attack the cause, not just the symptoms. It offers, they say, a holistic approach to health and fitness. Many professional athletes, looking for the edge have turned to yoga as a supplementary form

of training. They have found that yoga aids their state of mental and physical relaxation between training sessions, and their crucial build-up to big meets, where a competition is usually won or lost in the mind.

Perhaps one of yoga's major attractions is that it combines physical and mental exercise. It is excellent for posture and flexibility, both key physical elements for most sports-people, and in some respects, there are strength benefits to be gained. Yoga teachers say that the approach of yoga therapy is one of the most effective ways of achieving the mental edge that athletes seek.

Marian Fenlon, one of Brisbane's leading yoga teachers of the past 20 years, is the author of two books on the subject and has had thousands of yoga pupils. Many of them have, in turn, become teachers. Believe it or not, she has even taught yoga to footballers. Many years ago, she took Brisbane Souths rugby league team for an eight-week course and, amazingly, it was well-received. She says there are eight components to yoga therapy - attitudes, disciplines, posture and flexibility, breathing, sensory awareness, concentration, contemplation and meditation. Yoga can play a substantial supporting role to modern medicine, and complement other fitness and exercise programs. While there is no great component of aerobic fitness in yoga therapy, it complements aerobic exercise because of breathing techniques that can be learned. So there are advantages for even the most demanding of aerobic sports - swimming, cycling and running. There are numerous documented cases of yoga relieving or curing serious illnesses - such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses like asthma and emphysema.

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## **Diabetes**

Diabetes in various forms affects up to 5percent of the world population with 12 million diabetics in Western Europe alone. Of the different ways in which diabetes presents, noninsulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) is probably the most commonly encountered genetic disease. NIDDM or Type II diabetes is multifactorial, depending also on environmental factors including obesity, sedentary lifestyles and nutritional imbalances.

Yoga has shown some beneficial results in curing diabetes. The yoga exercises that are prescribed for curing diabetes is different from hatha yoga exercise because it involves positions tailored to treat certain conditions, as well as meditation, relaxation and stretching exercises.

One of the studies conducted to cure diabetes was the one set up by the Yoga Biomedical Trust, founded in 1982 by biochemist Dr Robin Monro, and an Indian yoga research foundation which discovered that practicing yoga for 30 minutes a day for one month helped reduce blood glucose levels in some diabetics.

The yoga patients took part in one or two 90-minute sessions a week and were asked to practice at home. The classes included the specific yoga exercises of the spinal twist, the bow and abdominal breathing.

At the end of the 12 weeks blood sugar levels fell significantly in all patients in the group and were slightly raised in a control group which had not joined in the yoga sessions. Three yoga students managed to reduce their medication, including one man who had not changed his drug regime for 20 years.

It has been known for a long time that exercise is helpful for diabetics. Yoga therapy may help reduce stress levels which could play a part in maturity onset diabetes. But one drawback is that some patients would find it hard to keep up the regular sessions needed to sustain the benefit. All the patients said they would like to see these classes set up on a permanent basis but we don't have the money.

It is not necessarily the exercise component of the yoga therapy package which is most important, because there is not enough physical exercise to account for the changes, but stress reduction has a lot to do with it. Stress hormones increase sugar levels in the blood. People also benefit from the stabilization of their moods which yoga brings, an increased feeling of well-being and a feeling of being more in control, which may help with their diet control.

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## **Dynamic Yoga – Exercise 1 & 2**

### SWAYING PALM TREE POSE (Tiryaka Tadasana)

Streamlines the waist and develops balance. Stand with feet 8 inch apart and fix eyes on a point directly in front of you. Interlock fingers and turn palms outward. Inhale deeply as you raise arms over your head. As you breathe out, bend from your waist to your left side, taking care not to reach forwards or backwards. Hold for a few seconds, then inhale deeply and slowly return to the upright position.

Repeat 5 times to each side.

### CAT-STRETCH POSE (Marjari-asana)

Kneel and lean forward to place hands on floor below your shoulders, fingers facing forward, hands in line with knees. Arms and thighs should be at right angles to the floor; knees may be slightly separated.

Inhale deeply, raise head and drop spine so your back is concave. Fill your lungs and hold for three seconds. As you exhale, lower your head and stretch your spine upwards. At the end of the breath, pull in your buttocks, contract stomach muscles and place head between arms.

Repeat 5 times.

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**Dynamic Yoga – Exercise 3 & 4**

**POSE OF THE MOON (Shashankasa)**

Sit on your knees with palms on thighs. Close eyes and relax, but keep spine and head straight.

Inhale deeply and lift arms above head, keeping them straight and shoulder-width apart. As you breathe out, bend forward from the hips, keeping arms and head in a straight line. Hands and forehead should eventually rest on the floor in front of your knees. Bend your elbows, so that arms are fully relaxed and hold for five seconds.

Then breathe in and slowly raise arms and body back to the upright position.

Exhale and return your palms to the top of your thighs. Repeat 3-5 times.

**MOUNTAIN POSE (Parvatasana)**

Strengthens nerves and muscles in the arms and legs, and stimulates the circulation in the upper spine.

Kneel on raised heels and stretch your arms forward so your forehead is on the floor. Breathe deeply and relax for a few seconds. Raise yourself on to your hands and knees, keeping your toes tucked under and your back flat.

Inhale and push up onto your toes. Raise your buttocks and lower your head between your arms. Your back and legs should form two sides of a triangle.

Exhale, rest your feet on the floor and try to touch the floor with the top of your head. Hold the position for 10 seconds.

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#### **Equipment**

Yoga is a challenging discipline for the beginning to the advanced person. The asanas, or postures are slow and steady and are not meant to be painful, but this does not mean that they are not challenging. Never extend yourself too much to cause discomfort. With practice, you should see yourself relaxing into the stretches with ease.

Nevertheless, for beginners there are a few tips when practicing yoga. Release all thoughts, good or bad before you begin. Turn off your phone and don't answer the door, you need peace and quiet. Make sure you take a warm, relaxing shower and that you wear comfortable clothes that will allow you to stretch easily. You can use aromatherapy that will relax and help to clear your thoughts. You will want to purchase a yoga mat so you can rest on the pad and not slip and slide on the floor. Make sure your shoes and socks are off and that your hair is either comfortably pulled back or no, whatever feels better. Turn the lights low (or you can do it in the sunlight), whatever suits you. You may want to turn some relaxing music of nature, perhaps the beach. Belts or ropes are used to grab your legs and pull them into a better stretch, which should feel delicious. Blocks are used to prop yourself up and sit better or for standing postures.

Without the prop support, you may not be able to attain some postures. Just remember that although the postures are important, performing them absolutely perfectly is not the goal. Yoga is not just an exercise; it includes the mind and intelligence and the reflection in action. These tools make it easier for you as a beginner in yoga, but you will find that eventually you will not need them. Some people prefer taking a yoga class so they are guided properly. There is nothing wrong with this, but keep in mind that only you can take your mind and spirit as far as it was meant to go, alone.

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#### **Exercises**

Yoga exercises strengthen your body and make it more flexible. Yoga also calms your mind and gives you energy. In active sports or strenuous exercises, you use up energy. In yoga classes, students report that they feel tranquil after a class, yet have more energy. Slow and steady motion is the key to going into or coming out of the postures. You hold a yoga pose for several seconds or even minutes and give attention to full, quiet breath. Your yoga instructor will always encourage you to relax as the exercises

are being done.

You gently place your body into yoga postures. Done correctly, there's very little chance of injury or muscle stress. A particular asana is not repeated dozens of times, nor are you ever encouraged to push yourself too much.

A yoga session is designed for balance. You stretch to the right and then to the left. You bend back and then forward. You learn to recognize when one side is stronger or more flexible than the other. Thus harmony and balance are achieved with yoga practice.

People of all ages can practice yoga exercises. They are easily modified to meet your needs and physical condition. Don't be put off by the difficult looking postures you may see in a yoga book. A skilled teacher can adapt most asanas by using chairs, cushions, even a wall or other props. A yoga practice can be tailor-made just for you. If something is really impossible for you to do, just forget it. Never compete with yourself or others. Yoga is a stress-free but powerful way to exercise.

Yoga is good for increasing your flexibility and relieving stress, but it doesn't take the place of aerobic exercise. You should still do regular, aerobic exercise, which increases your cardiovascular fitness, helps you lose weight, and, for people with non-insulin-dependent (type II) diabetes at least, improves blood glucose control.

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## **For Some People, Learning Yoga on CD-ROM is a Stretch**

As if to lend weight to my contention that your computer can, in theory, teach you anything, along comes a pair of CD-ROMs called Wellness Yoga and Shiatsu Relaxation.

Lithe young women demonstrate these ancient Eastern techniques while mellow-voiced narrators speak over somnambulant music, the better to relax you and make you all well.

Most of us are familiar at least with the concepts of yoga, its slow stretching exercises and its often almost unattainable physical positions. Wellness Yoga is a nicely designed program that packages 74 asanas, or positions, into several packages such as the Quick and Easy Course, the Beauty Course and the Health Course.

The program consists largely of what it calls procedure screens, in which each position is demonstrated in one window while described textually in another. A narrator reads that same text aloud. In addition to the usual tape-recorder buttons to pause, stop and restart the action, there is a graph that displays the approximate duration of each segment of the routine.

The practical difficulties of using this CD-ROM are fairly obvious. The manual, dragged kicking and screaming into English from its Japanese roots, advises the user to "First practice forming the pose while watching the screen and try memorizing the whole procedure." This, unless you have a 24-inch monitor or keep your monitor on the floor, is likely to be difficult. Clearly the actual learning of the poses could be more readily done with a videotape.

On the other hand, you can hunt around in the CD-ROM, choose from the positions you want to learn, and collect them into personal groups. And maybe you've got a really big monitor, and a cordless, long-distance mouse.

This is a nice program, well-made and instructive. My only complaint is that it does not emphasize clearly enough that unless you are as slender as the model executing the poses, you are not going to be able to do many of them -- the Crow, the Heron and the Frog, for instance -- correctly. On the other hand, we can all do the Corpse.

Shiatsu Relaxation, which teaches a massage technique clearly related to acupuncture, is another kettle of fish.

The theory is that rubbing, kneading or poking specific points on the body, called acupressure points, will make other parts of the body feel better. I am not prepared to argue that premise, but the entire procedure seems shiatsu yourself is not clear, either; the program initially suggests you find some of your own more accessible pressure points, but they are not all available to your own hands and all the demonstrations show one person ministering to another.

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## **Go Straight to Video for Yoga Training**

The various postures of yoga have long been used as a basis for the stretching moves that are prescribed for athletes or used in other forms of exercise. It's no surprise, then, that a flood of yoga tapes is hitting the market.

There are tapes for Olympic-level athletes and tapes for rank beginners. There are tapes that will challenge your strength and endurance, and tapes that will lull you into blissful relaxation.

Here's a look at four yoga tapes, from the most difficult to the most basic. The only thing you need to get started is comfortable clothes and a non-skid surface like a sticky mat.

Embracing Power Yoga

This tape, led by Los Angeles instructor-to-the-stars Mark Blanchard, is the yoga version of boot camp. It's 85 challenging minutes of constant movement designed to build strength and endurance, with Blanchard leading a class of 13 men and women.

The tape is billed as appropriate for all levels, and there's a 5-minute segment at the beginning that offers a quick summary of how to do many of the basic yoga poses in the tape.

But that's not enough for novices, and the rest of the tape is far too strenuous for those who aren't extremely fit. You can tell that Blanchard isn't very interested in newcomers to yoga because he ignores the poor, fumbling fellow in the back row who has little flexibility.

Despite these deficiencies, this tape is wonderfully challenging and effective workout, judging by the sweat that pours off the members of the class. But unless you're already in good shape -- and by the standards of this tape, that means you can do push-ups, balance easily on one leg and have abs of steel -- you'll be better off with an easier tape.

**Yoga Zone: Power Yoga for Strength and Endurance**

This routine provides a great introduction to the strength-building postures of power yoga. It's taught by Lisa Bennett, who leads two exercisers through the 55-minute class.

One exerciser is a beginner; the other is more advanced. Beginners will be heartened to see that Bennett devotes plenty of time to helping Gina, the beginner, find modified versions of the postures that allow her to complete every segment of the routine. And veterans can learn much from her work with Charles as she guides him into more challenging moves.

One of Bennett's major strengths is her ability to provide clear, detailed descriptions of proper form, from the angle of a bent knee to the direction of an extended arm.

Though there's hard work to be done in this routine, Bennett's comforting tone and understanding demeanor make it pleasurable.

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### **Got a Few Minutes**

Ina Mirx is 68, looks 35, and can do things with her body that a 16-year-old farm hand can't do, but she wasn't always fit-as-a-fiddle.

At the age of 30, while pregnant, she was forced to jump from the third story of a burning hotel. She landed on concrete, fractured her spine and pelvis, broke several ribs -- and lost her child.

Over the next 10 years Marx tried nearly every kind of regimen to rescue herself from this state. Nothing worked, and she eventually reached such desperation that she attempted suicide, twice. Then she discovered yoga -- her salvation.

With new confidence and a new lease on life, she began teaching yoga and has also written two books, "Yoga and Common Sense" and "Fitness for the Unfit."

With her special yoga program, she combines the physical aspects of Hatha Yoga with Raja Yoga, the meditative side.

Her method is specially designed to reach out to all those who have been left in the dust of the high-energy, high-impact state of modern fitness programs, and those who need to relax and unwind in a short amount of time to relieve a lot of stress quickly.

What's more, the best thing about Marx's form of yoga is that a few stretches a day, for a few minutes a day -- at home or in the office -- can lead couch potatoes and grouches to a very bright light at the end of the tunnel.

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#### **Hatha Yoga**

Hatha yoga is an ancient hindu system of working with the human nervous system. Because it releases tension and endows one with renewed energy, far too many 20th century people, yoga teachers included, have come to look upon the venerable Indian physical science as solely an exercise for health and vitality of mind and body. It is that, but it is also much more. Hatha yoga practices are more spiritual than physical, more subtle than gross, more a means of understanding than an exotic way to relieve stress or limber up the body.

The sages who developed hatha yoga designed it as a way to gain conscious control of our life energies, a way to go within, to harmonize the external so the innermost Self could be encountered. To them, it was about states of consciousness, about living a divine life, and it was a preparation for meditation.

As you perform the asanas, concentrate on feeling the energies within the nerve currents. Sensitize yourself to knowing when the body has been in each position long enough to tune the nerve currents involved. Then shift smoothly into the next asana. It's like a dance, a deliberate, fluid dance. During all postures, inhale using the diaphragm, not the chest muscles. Do not stretch unduly or force the body. Relax into the poses. Don't worry if you can't perform them all perfectly. In time, you will find the body becoming more flexible and supple. Free the mind of thoughts and tensions. You will be more aware, more alive, more serene.

While there are many more complex hatha yoga routines, these twenty-four asanas provide a balanced system for daily use. For the simple purpose of quieting the mind in preparation for meditation, this is all you will ever need. For best results, hatha yoga should be taught personally by a qualified teacher. These instructions and drawings are meant only as a rudimentary aid. For more elaborate regimens, inquire at a recognized school specializing in hatha yoga.

The scene of hatha yoga has a spiritual purpose - to balance physical and psychic energies in preparation for meditation. It is not only meant to make us young, beautiful or creative, but to aid us in quieting the mind, body and emotions that we may awaken enlightened consciousness & know the Self within.

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#### **High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)**

For controlling your hypertension, there are two effective yoga exercises that help lower the blood pressure:

### Inverted Yoga

Inverted yoga reverses the action of gravity on the body. The most profound changes brought about by Inverted Yoga is in circulation. In inverted poses, legs and abdomen are placed higher than the heart.

Lengthening up through the legs and keep them very active so your spine opens and the entire body actively involved in the pose.

One of the reasons for this is simply because the force of gravity is reversed and venous return becomes significantly greater.

Normally, the muscles of the calf and other skeletal muscles in the lower extremities must contract in order to pump unoxygenated blood and waste back to the heart through the veins.

In inverted poses, gravity causes the blood to flow easily back through the veins and this brings the blood pressure in the feet to a minimum. This in effect gives skeletal muscles a chance to rest.

In Inverted poses, drainage of blood and waste from the lower body back to the heart is increased and disorders such as varicose veins and swollen ankles are relieved.

### Rhythmic Breathing

It's time to learn about breathing, because inhaling and exhaling has the power to nourish the body and calm the mind.

Not just any old breathing will do. If you're like most people, you take shallow breaths, pull in your stomach when you inhale and never empty your lungs of carbon dioxide when you exhale.

Here's the physiological explanation: Long, slow breaths are more efficient than short, fast ones.

To take in a good breath, your lungs must first be basically empty. Thus the key to efficient breathing lies in exhaling completely. A full exhalation begins with the upper chest, proceeds to the middle chest and finishes with tightening the abdominal muscles.

Only after a good exhalation can you draw in a good lungful of the oxygen-rich air your blood needs for nourishing cells.

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### **History of Yoga**

Yoga began in India 3,000 to 4,000 years ago. The word yoga comes from the Sanskrit language and means, to join or integrate, or simply union. Yoga started, as far as we know, as part of India's philosophical system, but not everyone practiced yoga, and it has never been a religion.

About 5 million people in the United States do some yoga. Dance and stretching exercise classes usually have parts and pieces that come directly from yoga. If you ever go to a physical therapist, he or she may give you therapeutic exercises that are yoga postures.

There are several types of yoga. The yoga you may have seen on TV or taught at your local Y or an adult education class is called hatha yoga, or physical yoga. Sometimes it's known as the yoga for health. You may also find yoga being taught in a hospital or medical setting. Many health professionals today feel yoga can be part of a treatment plan.

Hatha yoga has three parts: a series of exercises or movements called asana (poses or postures in English), breathing techniques of all kinds, and relaxation.

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### **How to Start**

You can get audio or video tapes that give breathing instruction and teach relaxation techniques at health food stores, bookstores, and by mail order. It's probably fine to learn breath and relaxation from a tape or booklet, but don't try the yoga exercises without a skilled teacher. He or she can make corrections, caution you when necessary, and help you to adapt poses, if you need to.

It will be worth it to you to spend a little time finding an instructor who is right for you. Your diabetes nurse educator or other health care professional may be able to recommend a yoga instructor. Get referrals for a yoga instructor as you would for any professional you might wish to consult.

Yoga instructors aren't required to be certified, but many are, through many different programs. Ask prospective teachers if they are certified. A certified teacher isn't necessarily better than someone who isn't certified, but it's something to consider.

Yoga is fun, healthy, and calming. It's a wise way handed down over several thousands of years. There is little danger in yoga, and even a little progress brings with it freedom and peace of mind.

Although most people with diabetes can exercise safely, exercise involves some risks. To shift the benefit-to-risk ratio in your favor, take these precautions:

Have a medical exam before you begin your exercise program, including an exercise test with EKG monitoring, especially if you have cardiovascular disease, you are over 35, you have high blood pressure or elevated cholesterol levels, you smoke, or you have a family history of heart disease.

Discuss with your doctor any unusual symptoms that you experience during or after exercise such as discomfort in your chest, neck, jaw, or arms; nausea, dizziness, fainting, or excessive shortness of breath; or short-term changes in vision.

If you have diabetes-related complications, check with your healthcare team about special precautions. Consider exercising in a medically supervised program, at least initially, if you have peripheral vascular disease, retinopathy, autonomic neuropathy, or kidney problems.

Learn how to prevent and treat low blood glucose levels (hypoglycemia). If you take oral agents or insulin, monitor your blood glucose levels before, during, and after exercise.

If you have type I, and your blood glucose is above 250 milligrams per deciliter, check your urine for ketones. Don't exercise if ketones are present, because exercise will increase your risk of ketoacidosis and coma.

Always warm up and cool down.

Don't exercise outdoors when the weather is too hot and humid, or too cold.

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## **Infertility**

Infertility is defined as the inability to conceive after one year of trying, or the inability to carry pregnancies to a live birth. It affects one out of six couples of childbearing age in the United States today - at least ten million people. And in a career-oriented area like Washington, where many couples postpone decisions about childbearing until professional goals have been met, the ration of one in six is probably on the conservative side. Yet it is rarely discussed, and understood even less.

For almost all couples the condition comes as a surprise. And no wonder. It seems as if the whole is on its guard against producing unwanted children. Every day 19.9 million women in this country wake up and remind themselves to take the Pill. In China, a woman with more than three children is considered

an enemy of the state. In India, population experts fear the country may end up at century's close with four times as many people as it started with - up from 250 million in 1900 to one billion. The huge nation has resorted to quickie vasectomies and cash rewards at commuter train stations. Two will do posters are everywhere.

Although infertility may affect people of all social classes, the childless poor usually have neither the time nor the money to undergo a lengthy series of tests - commonly called an infertility work-up - to determine the cause of the problem. There may also be class differences in a person's willingness to endure many sacrifices so that a long-range goal can be realized. For these reasons, the inability to conceive and bear children seems to be a middle and upper middle-class problem.

The anguish of infertility will strike increasing numbers of couples in the next few years, however, as the children of the baby boom reach their late twenties and early thirties. Many who till now have postponed marriage and childbearing for their careers will turn to both to round out their lives - and find child-bearing not possible.

The men, after years of enjoying what they consider a healthy sex drive, will be shocked to learn that their sperm are too few in number or perhaps not active enough to effect a conception. The women may be given a finding of endometriosis, a condition in which parts of the uterine lining seed themselves in various places along the reproductive tract. Unknown in cultures where women marry young, it is a common finding in American women past 30. Or the women may be part of the 10.9 million who took the Pill every day whether or not previous gynecological abnormalities should have warned the physician against a prescription.

A generation ago, before the current explosion in medical technology, many couples who could not produce children were told there was nothing wrong with them: either it was all in their heads or God's will. There was also smirking ignorance on the public, the insinuation they weren't performing correctly in bed.

In fact, male impotence is the source of less than five per cent of the cases of male infertility, and the sources of impotence are extremely varied, from diabetes to perineal nerve injury to psychogenic causes.

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## **Insomnia**

Sleep is an essential part of good health. A good night's sleep can help you feel good, look healthy, work effectively and think clearly.

But sleep is not always so easy to come by. If you sometimes have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, you're not alone. A 1991 Gallup study found that more than one-third of all Americans suffer occasional or chronic insomnia.

People often are surprised to learn that daytime drowsiness is not an inevitable, harmless byproduct of modern life, but rather a key sign of a sleep problem that could be disastrous if not treated.

Recent figures show that nearly a quarter of the population regularly cannot go to, or remain asleep, and every year doctors write out more than 14 million prescriptions for sleeping tablets.

The causes of sleeplessness are many and varied. 'It can be due to a medical condition, such as chronic pain from rheumatism or arthritis,' says Professor Jim Horne, who runs the Sleep Research Laboratory at Loughborough University. 'Or it can be chemical, as a result of drinking tea, coffee or alcohol. Chronic or long-term insomnia is often associated with depression or anxiety, and environmental factors certainly contribute.'

And sleepless nights, staring wild-eyed into the darkness, are worse than bad dreams,

For too many people--an estimated 9percent of the American population--a good night's sleep is an elusive goal. The consequences of fatigue from chronic sleeplessness include accidents in the car and at work, a dramatically increased risk of major depression, and worsening physical illness.

Immediate relief is available, in the form of hypnotic agents, for persons who have difficulty in falling or remaining asleep or who cannot obtain restful, restorative slumber. However, long-term improvement usually involves behavioral therapy. These therapeutic approaches must be integrated if the patient's short- and long-term needs are to be addressed.

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## **Instant 10-minute Yoga: New Form of Yoga**

Do you drag yourself out of bed on Monday mornings, exhausted before you've even begun the week. Or maybe you can't enjoy your evenings, because work drains you of every ounce of energy.

Don't worry, you can boost your energy levels and balance your body with a new form of yoga - dynamic yoga.

Its simplicity and almost instantaneous benefits have made it one of the most fashionable alternative exercises of the new Millennium. Normally known for its relaxation benefits, dynamic yoga can boost your energy levels in just 10 minutes.

It includes some of the most basic yoga postures. You can try each of them individually, or in succession, but none of them should be rushed. However, you should feel the benefits after just ten minutes.

The deep stretches and graceful movements help to unblock energy, improve muscle tone and increase your general stamina. When practised regularly, say enthusiasts, you will experience improved energy levels, greater sexual vitality and better self-discipline. In the long-term, the breathing and body exercises will help detoxify your mind of tension and strain, creating calm and an inner peace.

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## **Kundalini Yoga**

The word Kundalini is a familiar one to all students of Yoga, as it is well known as the power, in the form of a coiled serpent, residing in Muladhara Chakra, the first of the seven Chakras, the other six being Svadhishthana, Manipuraka, Anahata, Visuddha, Ajna and Sahasrara, in order.

Less is historically known of the Agamas than the Vedas, because the latter provide descriptive poem-pictures of Vedic life. The original Agamas are twenty-eight in number. They are called Saiva Agamas as they focus on establishing a relationship with and ultimately realizing the Supreme Being Siva. They carry names like Vira, Hero, Siddha, Perfected and Swayambhuva, naturally revealed.

The Agamas are divided into four parts called padas, lessons. The first two padas - Chariya good conduct, and Kriya, external worship, - include all the details of personal home life, house planning, town planning, personal worship in temples, the architectural plans for temples and sculpture as well as the intricacies of temple puja. The final two padas - Yoga, internalized worship and union, and Jnana, enlightened wisdom, - vividly describe the processes and stages of kundalini yoga, and the God-like plateaus of consciousness reached when Sivahood is attained. In the actual texts, the padas are ordered with jnana first, yoga second, then kriya and chariya - unfurling from a God-state to a human state.

The Agamas contain tens of thousands of verses, much more prolific than the Vedas. Though the Vedas stayed strictly in Sanskrit, the Agamas proliferated across India and other countries through many languages. But they fared poorly over the millennia, particularly the Yoga and Jnana Padas - so high and powerful. The custodian Saiva priests neglected them. Many padas of entire Agamas were lost or destroyed.

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### **Origins of Yoga**

Today's society is much faster paced than ever before. People have more stress problems which lead to more health problems, mental and physical. There are more concerns with toxicity in the food we eat and the air we breathe. Millions of Americans today live a sedentary lifestyle, which is associated with obesity. The body, the cavities of our soul, was not meant to deteriorate in such a way that leads to disease. Yoga was developed over 5,000 years ago in India and it included spiritual beliefs, physical techniques, and scholarly philosophy.

There is a growing trend to practicing Yoga for many different reasons, which include attaining the yoga body or physique, relaxation and peace of mind, or to prevent injury and ailments. Americans mainly practice Hatha Yoga, which focuses on postures and stretching the body.

Yoga, which is derived from the sacred Sanskrit language of India, meaning \*union\* or \*to yoke or harness\*. Yoga is a way or path to transcendence and liberation from the self and the ego by purifying the mind and body. Practicing yoga leads to a union with the mind and body or the individual and universal consciousness. In other words, yoga is the union with the Individual Self and the Universal Self. Yoga predates all other religions and has influenced and inspired many other traditions and philosophies. Yoga is better understood as a union of the physical, physiological, mental, emotional, and intellectual bodies, which leads to a purposeful and balanced life.

There is simply no other discipline quite like yoga because it utilized the body, mind and spirit, all in one practice. Yoga is indeed a spiritual path that is based on ancient sacred philosophy, but one does not need to make an ethical decision when practicing yoga, rather finding your own path is wholly accepted. The holistic benefits of yoga are suitable for the young or old, sick or well, with any religious background. The secrets of yoga are inwardness, concentration, and purification of mind and body with cleansing thoughts and food. Indian philosophy states that within man is the spirit that is the center of everything. \*Internal equilibrium is the basis and the ground for the higher illumination,\* The cultural Heritage of India (Vol. I) - published by The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, India

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### **Parkinson's Disease**

First described as "shaking palsy" the disease that now bears his name, medical science has thus far been unable to unravel the cause or causes of most Parkinson's cases or to devise a cure. Nonetheless, dramatic progress has been made in treating the disease, which is known to afflict about half a million older Americans, or one person in 100 over age 50. This figure does not include the untold thousands with symptoms of the disease that are not severe enough to prompt them to seek a diagnosis. But early diagnosis is important.

Diagnosis of Parkinson's disease is based on the patient's symptoms and performance on certain neurological and neuropsychological tests, along with ruling out other possible causes of those symptoms. Some cases of what doctors call Parkinsonism are caused by potent drugs used in the treatment of schizophrenia and other psychiatric illnesses or they are a result of poisoning by manganese.

Through medication, exercise regimens and tips on adaptive living measures, modern treatment can forestall or reduce the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, allowing patients to lead full and active lives for years after diagnosis and often for the rest of their lives because most of its victims are elderly. The late stages of the disease, however, can leave patients vulnerable to pneumonia, blood clots and bodywide infections that can be fatal.

Yoga has a major role in management of Parkinson's as it has emerged as a beneficial alternative therapy and an ideal form of exercise for Parkinson's patients because of its slow movements. Following the steps mentioned below could effectively help people with Parkinson's:

Concentrate on controlling your breath (Pranayama) as this form of yoga helps in moments of panic – such as feet sticking to the floor when walking.

In this form of yoga, the mind is always alert.

Few yoga exercises like back strengthening postures, lots of shoulder movements, breathing practices and some meditation definitely helps.

One of the most useful forms of yoga used for Parkinson's is Ashtanga Yoga. It works to strengthen the body and do increases blood circulation.

Daily practice of yoga is essential since Parkinson's itself does not necessarily weaken the muscles. Weakening of muscles is generally caused by lack of movement. Daily practice should be encouraged, but not enough to cause fatigue.

Parkinson's also result in the loss of movement of the facial muscles. Pranayama and other yoga movements could help in relaxing those muscles and bring in smile on the faces of the patient.

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#### **Patanjali's Yoga Sutras**

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is a text that covers many aspects of life, beginning with a code of conduct and ending with the goal of yoga, a vision of one's true Self. The Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is probably the most authoritative text on yoga. It defines yoga as a focusing of the attention to whatever object is being contemplated to the exclusion of all others. Yoga isn't only about postures, or meditation, it is a way of life, or religion. In this influencing scripture there are eight steps to awakening or enlightenment through yoga. These eight astanga or limbs of yoga are: yamas, niyamas, asanas, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.

The yamas consist of lessons in moral and social conduct in our environment. It teaches us to restrain from lying, stealing, and greed. Non-violence and consideration toward all living things is the key. Communication with sensitivity towards others and moderation in all things we do is revered.

The niyama focuses on attitudes towards ourselves: compromising, cleanliness, serenity, devotion, and asceticism. One should study and reverence to a higher intelligence. There is an acceptance of our limitations in relation to God. It is key to have removed the impurities from the mind and body.

In the asanas, one focuses on posture practice, positioning the body while incorporating the breath to achieve a greater awareness in the mind. One is alert and relaxed without tension, while observing the reactions of the body and breath to various postures. This minimizes the effect of the external influences on the body, such as diet and climate.

Pranayama, or the restraint and control of the breath, helps with concentration, energizing and balancing of the mind and body.

Pratyahara is the relaxation of the senses, where no distractions actually activate the mind.

Dharana, or concentration, is the ability to direct the mind toward a chosen object and focus in on it alone.

Dhyana, or meditation, is the ability to develop focused interactions with what we seek to understand.

Lastly, but most importantly, Samadhi is the ultimate state of Self-realization, or union with the Source.

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#### **Perfect Truths about Yoga**

Turbaned gurus, sing-song mantras and bodily contortions . . . the promise of true enlightenment and omphaloskepsis (contemplation of the naval) completes the cliché. But don't knock yoga till you've tried it, and then only with respect.

Yoga means to bind together -- variously joining sun and moon, left and right, male and female, and any number of yins and yangs -- through ascetic techniques of meditation and exercise. The goal is physical and mental balance.

Indian Hatha' yoga is best known to Westerners. Double-jointedness isn't a prerequisite, but the classic lotus position, cross-legged on the floor, soles-up on the inner thigh, either comes naturally or doesn't.

Then there are more magical/mystical varieties of yoga for which people quit jobs and polite society and retreat to the Himalayas. But not everyone follows a spiritual guide beyond the Beltway; they'd rather take up the discipline at a local ashram or the Y.

Committed practitioners claim yoga leads to intuitive awareness, spiritual harmony, perfect concentration. Others use it to lose weight or quit smoking. Some just like the lift they get from yoga asanas (positions) better than breaking into a sweat with pushups. In any case, it can't hurt, if done in moderation and with proper guidance.

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#### **Posturing: Introduction**

It increases muscular strength. It reduces tension and stress. It has a low potential for injury, and it doesn't even look like exercise.

Why, then, don't more people practice yoga.

People think of yoga as being passive and mystical - an otherworldly activity that doesn't relate to their lives. People are experiencing a vacuum because of all the outward directed activity, and they are going to have to go back to the experience of self.

Although the Indian discipline of yoga has been practiced for more than 5,000 years, in this country there are few followers. Almost half the American adult population swims and close to a quarter runs or jogs, yet only 2 percent practices yoga.

The word yoga derives from the Sanskrit root yuj, meaning to yoke or connect. Through yoga's various techniques, one is said to arrive at mental and physical equilibrium, better health and inner peace. It has been described as providing, in effect, a "work-in" rather than a workout.

There are at least eight main branches of yoga and several offshoots of each, but essentially there are only two concerned with exercise: hatha yoga and kundalini yoga.

Hatha is the most popular type of yoga in the Western world. It is a slow-paced discipline that emphasizes controlled breathing and assuming various physical poses. It is said to aid the nervous system, the glands and the vital organs.

Kundalini, which was introduced to this country in 1969 by Yogi BhaJan, is more active, combining various modes of breathing, movement and meditation. It is based on the idea that body energy that is coiled below the base of the spine can be tapped so that it travels upward through different energy centers or chakras until it reaches the head. At this point one arrives at one's highest potential.

Classically, there are 84 basic yoga positions, or asanas, which are coordinated with special breathing techniques. The asanas range from simple bends and twists to pretzel-like contortions reserved for the most advanced practitioners. The various poses elongate the muscles and build flexibility. Along with the proper breathing, they help rid the body of tension. Static holds isolate and strengthen particular muscles.

Asanas have been evolved over the centuries so as to exercise every muscle, nerve and gland in the body. They secure a fine physique, which is strong and elastic without being muscle-bound, and they keep the body free from disease. They reduce fatigue and soothe the nerves. But their real importance lies in the way they train and discipline the mind.

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## **Prevention of Heart Attacks**

Strict changes in diet and lifestyle can not only prevent heart attacks, but can reverse the clogging of the arteries, according to a small but pioneering study.

The study showed that a vegetarian diet, moderate exercise and an hour a day of yoga and meditation could produce a reversal of atherosclerosis, a blockage of the arteries that can lead to a heart attack, in men and women who were strict in following the daily regimen.

Experts say this is the first study to report that such blockage can be reversed without using cholesterol-lowering drugs or surgery.

The study, which was conducted by Dr. Dean Ornish, director of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute in Sausalito, Calif., was presented at the meeting of the American Heart Association in New Orleans.

This is a tremendously important study in the control of heart disease. It's the very first study indicating regression of coronary heart disease without pharmaceutical intervention. The results also suggest that the current medical guidelines for changes in the habits of people with severe heart disease do not go far enough.

Previous studies have shown that exercise and diet changes can slow the progression of heart disease, but not reverse it.

While the study did not determine what percentage of improvement could be attributed to the lifestyle changes alone, the researchers noted that stress-control methods have been shown to ease recovery from a variety of disorders, including hypertension.

But some experts are skeptical of the need for stress-management methods, which are not currently among standard recommendations for those with severe heart disease.

Some experts on cardiac rehabilitation question whether most people with heart disease could follow such strict changes in their habits.

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## **Rewards of Yoga - E-Commerce Style**

As we enter a new millennium, more and more people are seeking lifestyle changes that foster mental and spiritual well-being as well as physical fitness. As a result of this trend, the ancient discipline of

yoga is currently undergoing a widespread renaissance. We are dedicated to bringing the benefits of yoga to the widest possible audience through the Internet.

With this statement, wailanayoga.com launched its grand opening on the World Wide Web.

People are more aware than ever of the health benefits of physical activity and fitness, says Wai Lana. regular exercise has been linked to a reduction in the risk of heart disease, strokes, and cancer. Although it is common knowledge that exercise helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, reduces blood pressure, and promotes psychological well-being, there is increasing consensus among health and fitness experts that physical activity doesn't need to be strenuous to be effective. Yoga offers the perfect combination of strength and flexibility.

Yoga's roots date back around 5,000 years when it was established as a form of meditation. The word 'yoga' in Sanskrit means 'union' - practicing yoga ultimately brings one back in touch with the state of union, or oneness, that exists at the core of every being, she added.

Wai Lana has been practicing and teaching yoga for over 25 years. Her television series, Wai Lana Yoga, is aired in the U.S. on PBS nationwide, as well as in over a dozen countries on five continents. She has produced and hosted nearly 200 half-hour television shows of yoga instruction. Wai Lana has also authored several books on yoga, recorded yoga music in a variety of styles, and released an award-winning series of yoga home videos.

The web site, wailana.com, features yoga asanas (exercises), yoga music, a guided meditation, vegetarian recipes, information on Wai Lana's television series, video and CD sales, and Wai Lana's personal life story.

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### **Some of the Lesser Known Yoga Videos**

With more than 100 yoga videos on the market, you can imagine the diversity among them - everything from nude yoga to postnatal yoga.

#### **Healing Yoga for Common Conditions**

This video promises to improve circulation, promote weight loss and manage the symptoms of diabetes and high cholesterol. Without a medical study it's hard to say if it can really deliver, but the hosts, Lisa and Charles Matkin, come with good credentials.

They have taught therapeutic yoga programs at Beth Israel Hospital in New York and New York Presbyterian Medical Center, working with physicians in using yoga to help people with chronic

injuries and illnesses.

The 35-minute video is designed to help you increase your metabolism, according to the Matkins. The couple begin the workout with Lisa demonstrating the moves next to a pool with an ocean in the background while Charles does the voice-over, then they switch, then switch again. Both have soothing voices and good form.

The workout is divided into three sections. The first deals with learning to control your breath. It's a pretty basic segment, teaching you breathing techniques and stretching out the body.

The second is for strength, and involves poses that are a bit more difficult, such as the warrior and downward-facing dog poses.

In the third section, you work on releasing tension and relaxation.

This is a good video for all fitness levels. The moves are explained well, as are the benefits and purposes of yoga. None of the poses is very difficult, and the instructors give you modifications to make the moves easier.

#### Power Strength Yoga for Beginners

Though the title says for beginners, don't believe a word of it. This video takes you through a vigorous set of poses collectively called the Sun Salutation (which you learn in another video, Power Yoga Stamina for Beginners).

Then, with the mountains of Maui as a backdrop, instructor Rodney Yee takes you through a series of very difficult poses including the pendulum, where you balance your entire body off the floor with the strength of your arms, and others that require a good deal of upper-body strength.

The workout takes only 20 minutes, but you work hard in those 20 minutes. It's the only yoga video of those reviewed here in which your heart rate gets close to an aerobic rate.

Yee has a great, soothing voice and perfect form, but he never really offers an explanation of the poses or an easier way to do them. Nor does he offer any help in how to build up to them. That said, if you have the upper-body strength, this is an amazing - and fast - way to get in a strength workout without having to go to the gym.

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**Ten Minute Yoga Plan to Pep Up**

Whether you might be staying home with a new baby or working too many hours at the office, anytime is a good time for yoga. You can do yoga stretches and postures in bed or even while driving to work.

Hundreds of fitness seekers use their lunch hour to squeeze in exercise and take off extra pounds.

I occasionally use my lunch hour for Yoga, said John Ray White, 35, who works at the Arkansas attorney general's office. Downward facing dog and sun salutation are two of the postures she practices every day.

Practicing yoga in the middle of day some people think is the break that they need to face the afternoon, said Ray.

Lunch-hour fitness routines become more popular in warm weather.

#### Kick Back Log-on Pose

Interlace your fingers behind your head. Relax your elbows and shoulders. Smile, breathe and stretch your elbows back. Let the tightness release slowly.

#### E-mail Meditation

While reading your e-mail, remember to breathe slowly and focus your attention on your breath. Make the out-breath two times longer than the in-breath. This will immediately calm you.

#### Photocopier Stretch

Place your hands on the edge of the copier. Stand back with feet apart. Drop your head and chest. Breathe and relax your shoulders.

#### Close-the-deal Warrior Pose

Raise your arms to the side with fingers pointed. Take a big step to the side, with your right foot out and knee bent, your left foot planted, left leg straight. Keep the upper body straight and strong, shoulders relaxed. Relax into the stretch -- don't hold your breath. Return to a standing position, switch sides and repeat.

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## **Work – Life Balance and Yoga**

After a surge of interest during the consciousness-conscious '60s, yoga began to fall out of favor. Exercisers apparently lost patience with the activity, which offers slow but steady results, and turned to the fast pace and quick shape-up of aerobics. Now yoga is back-less mystical than in the past, less reminiscent of gurus in pretzel positions, and more attractive than ever to people who are interested in working out rather than working toward some spiritual goal.

Once you step out of the metaphysical atmosphere, yoga is a great stretch and flexibility program. Yoga is increasingly being used by those who are having a trouble in balancing their work and personal life. A stressful working environment and a hectic schedule has a telling impact on the personal lives of the modern day executives and so they are turning to yoga to bring about a peace of their mind and to adopt a perfect work-life balance.

Also, many disgruntled runners, weight trainers and aerobic dancers complain that instead of reducing the stress in their lives, their exercise regimes add more.

People rush to work out every day at lunch, force themselves to keep up and then rushed back to work. Surely, it does something good for them, but it is just another pressure. Yoga is less competitive, less stressful, and above all gives a wonderful feeling of being.

Indeed, the healing aspect of yoga is a key to its renewed popularity. The strained knees, aching backs and neck pains generated by the push for fitness and the stress of making it in a competitive world have inspired a packaged set of a book and audio cassettes. Some orthopedic surgeons, chiropractors and neurologists are now referring patients to specific yogis during treatment.

Growing interest in the mind-body connection is fueling a major comeback of the ancient practice, boosted by research suggesting it can reduce stress and blood pressure, improve work performance, even slow effects of aging.

Several techniques are now being taught in mainstream hospitals and businesses; books about them are brisk sellers and discussion groups have sprung up on the Internet.

Even the Army is interested - it has asked the National Academy of Sciences to study meditation and other new age techniques that might enhance soldiers' performance.

Details differ, but a common theme is relaxing the body while keeping the mind alert and focused - on an object, sound, breath or body movement. If the mind wanders - and it always does - you gently bring it back and start again

Stress-related problems account for 60percent to 90percent of U.S. doctor visits, and mind-body approaches often are more effective, and cost-effective, than drugs or surgery. For example, 34percent of infertile patients get pregnant within six months, 70percent of insomniacs become regular sleepers and doctor visits for pain are reduced 36percent.

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#### **Yoga and Sports: Skiing**

It is incredible what yoga does for skiing. People can ski all day long and much better.

Conditioning before hitting the slopes can increase the safety and enjoyment of the sport. Most ski injuries occur early in the day when muscles are tight and enthusiasm is high, and late in the day when muscles are weakened and technique is poor.

A simple yoga exercise called the awkward pose, can increase your strength, balance and concentration which will make the ski season more rewarding.

It consists of three variations which are done sequentially.

To begin, stand with the feet apart, about shoulder width, an even distance (approximately six inches) between your heels and toes. Extend the arms out in front of you parallel to the floor with the shoulders pressed down and away from the head. Keep the upper body strong and firm in this position.

Bend your knees and shift the weight back into the heels, pushing the buttocks out behind you. When the top of the thighs are parallel to the floor and arms, hold your pose. The feet should be held parallel and the knees should only be shoulder width apart.

One good way to think of getting into this pose is to imagine that you are sitting in an invisible chair leaning back to bring the spine and shoulders against the back of the chair. The arm muscles are contracted, the abdomen is held tight and your breathing should be normal. Hold the pose for 20 seconds. Stand up.

The second part of this series is similar to the first. Keep the upper body the same as before and stand straight up onto the balls of the feet, standing as high as possible with the arches pressed forward. To keep the ankles strong and straight, press down with each big toe. Now, bend the knees again keeping the spine straight and stop when the quadriceps are parallel to the floor. Hold this pose for 20 seconds. Stand up. You will find this second pose a bit more difficult.

Third, assume the same basic pose with upper body firm and strong. Again, slowly bend the knees and this time sit all the way down lightly onto the heels. Now press the knees together and hold the body still. The quadriceps are again level with the floor and the spine is straight. Hold again for 20 seconds. Stand up out of the pose slowly, bring the heels down and relax. Don't forget to do a second set of all three poses.

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#### **Yoga and Sports: Tennis**

Tennis requires cat-like reflexes with short bursts of strength. These short movements do not allow the muscles to extend their full length. When muscles are strenuously worked they become tight and can lose their elasticity unless properly stretched. Yoga exercises can increase the body's range of motion. The lack of movement because of inflexibility binds the joints. Without the elasticity of the muscles, I think an athlete can be a prisoner within his own body.

Using yoga techniques makes it possible to retrain the muscles. Most tennis athletes play in a constant state of muscle tension. Yoga trains the body to relax muscle tension. Learning to begin your game in a relaxed state could mean gaining an extra step on the ball.

When in a ready position muscles are contracted and ready for action. To move, muscles must be relaxed and then contracted again to spring in any direction. By retraining the muscles you begin from a relaxed position, giving a quickened reaction time.

Yoga breathing exercises can help improve endurance and stamina. When exerting in sports or exercise we often hold the breath as a way to create strength. Yoga trains the body to create strength through breathing control. Holding the breath at points of exertion takes a great deal of energy that could be used during long sets or matches.

Learning the correct way while doing a yoga pose is simple. Exhale during the execution of a pose until you feel the muscles' full length of stretch (maximum resistance). Never hold your breath. Breathe normally and listen to the body. Hold for 30 seconds, then release the pose slowly. By constant practice of yoga poses you'll soon apply breathing techniques in everyday routines.

A simple spine twist is excellent for rotational sports. It can help increase needed flexibility of the shoulders and back and hips. Remember to apply the breathing technique to this pose.

Begin the spine twist by sitting on the floor with both legs straight out in front of you. Keeping the spine straight, bend the left leg placing the left foot on the outside of the right knee. Now, place the left hand on the floor behind you with your arm straight and the right elbow bent. Positioned on the outside of the left thigh place the right hand on the left hip.

Slowly exhale while turning the head and upper body to the left, looking over the left shoulder. Pressure from the right arm should keep the left leg stationary while pressure from the left arm and torso gives you the twist. Stronger use of both arms increases the twist. Hold this pose for 30 seconds and repeat twist on the opposite side.

A total body conditioning and flexibility routine is essential for the avid tennis player. Yoga techniques could be the edge you need in developing your game.

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### **Yoga for Business People: Do Not Get Distracted From your Goal**

Suresh Nigam, chairman of MetJet, one of the leading trainers of computer hardware engineers in India, not only practices yoga but preaches it at his 35 centers.

So what is it and how does it work.

At the heart of it is something which translates as the stoppage of mind modification. For example when we hear music we get distracted. We must stay aware and conscious but not get distracted from our goal.

How then does yoga, an ancient, essentially private activity, help in the work environment.

Suresh believes that the collective is an entity just as much as an individual is. If individuals are happy, calm and alert then the collective consciousness is harmonious and dynamic and will produce better results. If people are tense and unhappy it will reflect in their productivity.

At MetJet all managers and employees are sent to the Yoga Institute at Santa Cruz (in Mumbai) which was founded in 1989. There people are shown a path, how to control your mind and not to run after sensual pleasures. You learn not to run away from your responsibilities.

The root cause of these afflictions is ignorance. That leads to a grandiose sense of self-importance and misunderstanding. We love and hate in extremes. By getting up and finding out what is happening, we reduce stress. Once you are aware of what is going on you have won half the battle.

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### **Yoga for Business People: Enhance your Business Acumen**

There are many of us who feel we are not as bright as we would like to be; or that we lack the will

power a friend or a colleague seems to have. What is not known widely - or taken with skepticism even when known - is that mental power can be enhanced by Yoga and meditation.

Don't worry if your allopathic doctors dismiss this claim, or worse, laugh at it in contempt. Allopathic doctors tend to downplay such claims because allopathy has been brainwashed into a sort of negativism.

While the neuro-surgeon himself swears by the mantra which he recites every morning, believing it is instrumental in making divine energy flow through him, he feels that the beneficial effects of yoga on all professionals, particularly businessmen, have hardly been talked about.

Yoga or meditation is very beneficial to business executives because it makes decision-making much easier and quicker. It takes away vacillation and helps the brain to grasp the pros and cons quickly.

A surgeon needs to take a decision quickly on the operating table. Similarly, a businessman may not have more than five minutes to decide. Supposing he has a dollar 1 million business deal where a decision has to be made in five minutes, he needs a brain which is stimulated and in a trim state. In this state, decision-making becomes easy and anxiety level goes down.

In such a state not only is the brain able to think clearly, but the other systems of the body which suffer due to stress or tensions, are also spared.

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## **Yoga for Business People: Lifetime Habit**

Mr. La Forge (Yoga Trainer) suspects that because the mind-body exercises typically are easier to pursue, executives have a better chance of making a lifetime habit of them. To see if his hunch is correct, he launched a five-year study of 110 middle- and upper-level executives in companies in the US. He tracks their exercise habits and see if those incorporating mind-body techniques stick with the program longer.

Devotees say the mind-body exercise regimen has a payoff in the workplace, as well.

Barry Moltz, 36, founder and CEO of CHTech International., a mail-order distributor of computer hardware and software, started doing Yoga a year ago at the to balance the pressures of growing a business with starting a family. He still works out in a gym and commutes to work on his bicycle, but he also meditates in the half-lotus position for 15 or 20 minutes at night after his two young children

have gone to sleep.

He says most of his friends, also in their mid-30s, have jumped on similar mind-body fitness tracks.

"I think the toughest part about running a company is that there are so many demands on your time. When I meditate, it really allows me to relax and focus all my energies in one place," he says. "Now when I'm involved in a meeting, I can be immersed in that meeting instead of thinking about 15 other things. And people really respond when you're totally focused on just them."

The pressures of the job say you shouldn't be satisfied where you are today. You can never feel like you've achieved anything because it's very elusive. Yoga and meditation allows you to be happier and more effective in what you're doing now.

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## **Yoga for Business People: Mind-Body Connection**

A rising number of business people are finding the mind-body connection.

Yoga, meditation, and other Eastern-born exercises are finding a growing audience among harried business people craving inner calm. Classes are offered at health clubs, company fitness centers, corporate retreats and spas.

Ideas that once were left-of-center are finding greater acceptance with the public support. Mind-body executive fitness is a hot topic right now.

Lynn Doody, owner of Zen Fitness wellness programs in Chicago, notes that, whereas in the past most of her clients pursued traditional cardiovascular and weight-training exercise, most now incorporate mind-body applications into the regimen.

There's just a general awareness, and non-conventional health care is a little more available.

No need to convince Mark Frantz. The 40-year-old vice-president at Merrill Lynch & Co. had learned in 15 years of trading commodities to manage stress and anxiety. He ran a few times a week, worked out at the gym, and worked at reducing stress in other conventional ways.

But he still ground his teeth at night, massages were temporary Band-Aids, and even while running he'd tense his muscles. He wanted more. He sought "a different quality of life."

What he found was yoga and meditation. At home, on an airplane, or for 10 minutes behind closed

doors at work, Mr. Frantz can shut out distractions with deep breathing, yoga poses, imagery and other relaxation techniques.

He still runs, but '(yoga and meditation) forces you to focus on what's going on in the moment and to be aware of what your body is telling you. It relaxes you, brings your heart rate and your blood pressure down.

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## **Yoga for Business People: Workplace Implications**

Mind-body fitness, which derives from Eastern philosophies and religions, improves physical and emotional well-being, and has implications for workplace performance.

The overall benefits of mind-body exercise are documented in an increasing number of scientific studies. They include everything from reducing cardiac risk factors to enhancing mood.

'You're under stress, but you have to be in control all day, and after so many years, what happens is that leads to eating misbehaviors, stress hormone production and cardiac risk factors,. The good news is you can reverse these risk factors non-pharmacologically and develop some habits for a lifetime' that complement conventional diet and exercise.

The kinder, gentler movements typical of yoga improve flexibility, strength and muscle tone and can be more youth-promoting than the wear-and-tear of daily aerobics, weights and running alone.

Especially with the baby boomer generation getting older, they're realizing the need for flexibility, the need for good posture, and the desire for the things that are going to help them look and feel young.

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## **Yoga for Computer Users: Other Postures**

### The Diamond Posture (Vajrasana)

Kneel on a thick carpet or blanket with your knees close together. Sit back on your heels and stretch up from your hips, balancing your head well so that a line drawn through ear, shoulder, elbow and hip would be straight. You should sit up in this posture for greatest benefits.

### The Locust (Salabhasana)

Most yoga students are familiar with this posture. Lie flat, face down, chin on floor. Make your hands into fists and push them either under your thighs to help the lift, or place them alongside your body. Exhale and lift legs from your hips, tightening your buttocks and stretching your legs up and back. Hold position for as long as possible, exhale, return to starting posture and repeat.

### The Dog Stretch (Adho mukha svanasana)

Lie face down, legs stretched back, buttocks tightened and knees pulled back. Place hands just below shoulders, exhale and lift head, then chest, shoulders and torso, pushing down from your pelvis and straightening your arms. From the back of your head to your tailbone, your body should be curved back. Push shoulders back and down. Push head back more. Stay like this as long as possible with normal breathing. Come down very slowly, and relax.

### The Twist (Bhardwajasana)

Kneel on the floor and sit back, bringing both feet to the right of your hips. Straighten your right arm, bring it across your body and turn to the left. Place your hand, palm down under your left knee. Exhale, turn your body more to the left and clasp your right elbow with your left hand, from the back. Turn your head and gaze over your right shoulder. Fold position for a few breaths and then twist and look back over your left shoulder. Shoulders should be at right angles to the body. Come back to starting position and repeat on other side. You should do this posture once every hour if you have lower back pain.

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## **Yoga for Computer Users: Releases Lower Back Pain**

Twenty percent of all those who undergo surgery for lower back pain will get no relief. The remaining 80 percent will have problems ranging from mild to severe. All will have trouble with spinal flexion.

Yoga does not offer cures. It simply promises that if you faithfully practice these asanas every day, there will be no pain and you will build up a strong and supple spine, restructuring posture and body image. Once you have back problems you must remain conscious all through the day of how you stand,

sit and lie down. Here are a few guidelines:

Always sleep on a firm (not necessarily hard) bed, with a flat pillow under your head and a thicker one under your knees. This will help the spine to reposition and adjust itself.

Do not wear high heels as this promotes lumbar lordosis and throws the spine out of balance.

Do not go in for break-dancing, strenuous aerobics, jogging, running or anything where you need to bounce or jiggle. Guarded activity is the key here.

For lower back pain, sitting is the most painful. Sit on a firm seat, not squashy cushions, and sit on your buttock bones. Do not loll back on the tailbone or lower spine. Wedge a rolled towel or small cushion behind your back to keep you upright. Sit as often as possible in The Diamond Posture (Figure 1) in order to benefit the sciatic nerve and to cure a convex or a lateral curvature of the spine.

When the pain is acute and you can neither sit nor stand in comfort, rest in bed, take whatever anti-inflammatory or analgesic medications your physician prescribes, and wait until the pain is milder before starting on these postures.

All these asanas have healing and curative properties. They will act as a form of mild traction, gently stretching the spinal muscles in safe extension postures. Strength will be gradually built up in the paraspinal muscles and buttocks, abdominal organs will be toned and strengthened, and pressure points all along the spine will be stimulated. Practice each asana to the point where mild pain is felt.

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## **Yoga for Computer Users: Supported Side Stretches**

Many computer users around the world face the problem of back pain. Having your back against the wall usually means you're in trouble. But for certain yoga positions, having your back firmly against a wall will aid health.

In Hatha Yoga, the practitioner forms what Swami Gitananda calls body geometry--triangles, straight lines, circles and parallel lines. When you do a posture, always stretch your body to its utmost limit and then hold it there for a slow count of 10, gradually building up the time, until each posture can be maintained for 30 seconds. Holding a posture is essential to yoga because it gives the body a chance to settle into the stretch and loosen up. Then each time you stretch it will be just that little bit farther.

Many of the sideways, or lateral, stretches in Hatha Yoga require that the body face forward, with hips

level and back and spine tilting neither forward nor back. Beginners tend to lean forward to increase the stretch. But leaning forward is wrong and will actually detract from benefits and possibly cause harm. To perform these stretches properly, make sure to keep your spine firmly against a wall. The wall acts as a prop. Even those who have practiced yoga may find that they cannot bend as far as they thought they could when they do the postures properly. The extra time spent in forming careful postures will pay off: Your body will gain excellent flexibility and strength.

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Many computer users around the world face the problem of back pain. Having your back against the wall usually means you're in trouble. But for certain yoga positions, having your back firmly against a wall will aid health.

In Hatha Yoga, the practitioner forms what Swami Gitananda calls body geometry--triangles, straight lines, circles and parallel lines. When you do a posture, always stretch your body to its utmost limit and then hold it there for a slow count of 10, gradually building up the time, until each posture can be maintained for 30 seconds. Holding a posture is essential to yoga because it gives the body a chance to settle into the stretch and loosen up. Then each time you stretch it will be just that little bit farther.

Many of the sideways, or lateral, stretches in Hatha Yoga require that the body face forward, with hips level and back and spine tilting neither forward nor back. Beginners tend to lean forward to increase the stretch. But leaning forward is wrong and will actually detract from benefits and possibly cause harm. To perform these stretches properly, make sure to keep your spine firmly against a wall. The wall acts as a prop. Even those who have practiced yoga may find that they cannot bend as far as they thought they could when they do the postures properly. The extra time spent in forming careful postures will pay off: Your body will gain excellent flexibility and strength.

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## **Yoga for Computer Users: The Side-Angled Stretch**

Stand straight against the wall and stretch the feet about three to four feet apart. Inhale and raise arms up to shoulder level, palms down. Point right foot to the right and slightly turn in left foot. Bend right knee to form a right angle, with thigh parallel to the floor and the shin vertical. The knee should be directly above the ankle. Stretch the back leg and tighten the knee.

Exhale and stretch right hand down to rest on floor behind right foot. Turn head to look up and press left hip flat against wall with left hand. A strong pull should be felt all along the left side. When you feel comfortable, stretch the left arm up and press it against your ear so that from left heel to left hand the body is stretched and extended. Hold this position for a slow count of 10, making sure that upper shoulder, hip and bent knee are pressed against the wall. Inhale and return to starting position. Exhale and repeat on left.

Benefits: This posture produces overall health. It tones every muscle, tendon and joint in the body. The heart is revitalized and strengthened, and, if crooked, the spine is stretched and realigned. The hip joints, which can weaken with age, become stronger and more flexible. The neck is stretched and made more flexible, easing the pain of stiff, tense muscles and spondylosis. Thighs, hips and waist are firmed. Even digestion is improved.

Remember to lie down and relax after your yoga practice. Relaxation after exercising helps the body to recover, regulates the flow of blood, and calms and soothes the mind. That way you don't feel tired but refreshed and invigorated.

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## **Yoga for Computer Users: The Triangle**

Stand with your back against the wall. Place your feet two or three feet apart. Keeping feet firmly on the floor, and weight balanced on heels and toes, stretch your body up, pressing shoulders back and allowing arms to hang at your sides (Fig. 1). Inhale.

Exhale and slowly bend from waist, sliding your right hand down the right side as far as it will go. Shoulders should press back and hips should remain level, pointing forward. Head should be turned to the side, so that it's at a right angle to the body. Hold posture for 10 slow counts, inhale and come up to starting position. Exhale and repeat on left. Inhale and come up to starting position.

Exhale and rest a moment. Inhale and slowly raise arms to shoulder level, palms down. At the same

time, point the right foot to the right at a 90-degree angle while keeping the left foot turned in slightly. Exhale and bend to the right, sliding hand down to ankle or foot. If possible, touch the ground behind foot. Pull hip square against wall with left hand and turn head to look up.

Inhale and raise left arm straight up over head so that arms are in a straight line. Keep hips and torso against the wall as both arms stretch, one down and one up, touching the wall. Hold posture with smooth, even breathing for a slow count of 10. Inhale, come up and repeat on left.

Benefits: Trikonasana helps produce excellent spinal flexibility. It stretches the legs, back and neck and helps to loosen up the hips and make them strong and flexible. It is also, to some extent, a balance posture; in yoga, it is believed that the skill developed in physical balance has a profound effect on the mind, quieting unruly emotions and creating calm. It is one of the best postures for slimming the waist, hips, arms and legs. Remember to breathe deeply in when stretching up and breathe deeply out when bending the body downward.

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## **Yoga for Modern City Life: Ancient Practice Fits Modern Life**

When Trace Bonner launched Holy Cow in West Ashley's South Windermere Shopping Center last summer, she didn't know what to expect. Now she's teaching 16 classes a week and adding another instructor. And while she credits the center's success in part to its cute cow logo and convenient location, there's no question that there's a revived interest in yoga across America.

The ancient Indian practice of yoga first arrived in the US at the beginning of the 20th century, but didn't really catch on until 1969 with chants at Woodstock. Now, after being overshadowed by the aerobics craze in the '80s and early '90s, yoga is once again attracting followers, with many looking for relief from ailments and injuries or from the stress of daily life.

Baby boomers, worn out from years of jogging and bouncy workouts, are back on board. But interest is growing with other age groups, too, from college students to senior citizens to celebrities.

The surge in interest is being fueled partly by doctors' growing acceptance of yoga's healing potential. Mainstream medicine has adopted yoga as a gentle therapeutic method for treating a number of illnesses, so more and more doctors are referring their patients to yoga. Initial trials have shown yoga can help people with arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, asthma and cardiac risk factors.

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### **Yoga for Modern City Life: Hatha Yoga – Most Popular in the US**

There are actually several branches of yoga, including bhakti, the yoga of devotion, and jnana, the yoga of knowledge. The most widely practiced branch in the US, the one typically offered at gyms and exercise studios, is hatha yoga, which is physical yoga. But there also are different styles of hatha yoga, from the exercise-intense power yoga to the gentle chair poses used in svaroopaa yoga.

Many of the instructors offer integral yoga, which involves stretching and bending into various positions called asanas, as well as breathing exercises and deep relaxation. By practicing and learning asanas, students can gain flexibility, strength, stamina and improved circulation.

Integral yoga is not religious, but it does offer an introspective, spiritual component that you won't find in most exercise programs.

A typical adult class lasts 1 hour. First, the students center themselves through breathing, then come together as a group with a collective om. They do a quick series of cardiovascular movements, an hour of stretching and 20 minutes of relaxation while lying on their backs.

The relaxation period gives students a chance to turn inward. Some people are making lists in their head. Some people are asleep. Some people are just in a really great space, where they're conscious of what's going on in the room, and yet at the same time, completely and unequivocally out.

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### **Yoga for Modern City Life: Most Urbanites Start with a Class**

The best place to start is with a class, where a teacher can show you how to adapt poses using props and help you learn proper technique for the postures.

The good news is that yoga classes have never been more widely available. You'll find them at small studios, health clubs and gyms. The hard part is finding a class that's just right for you. Studios that are dedicated to yoga also foster a more dedicated practice. The same students return to class week after week, and instructors usually follow a particular discipline of yoga. Some classes are aimed at beginners.

Whether you consider a studio or health club classes, here are some tips to find qualified instructors and classes that suit your needs:

Define your goals. Do you have chronic back pain or other physical limitations. An Iyengar-based class, with its emphasis on proper form and use of props, would be ideal. Looking to improve concentration and reduce stress. Consider a class that incorporates meditation. Seeking a challenging workout. Try an ashtanga class.

Ask about the instructor's background. There is no national certification program for yoga yet, although some disciplines have their own rigorous teaching certification programs. You want an instructor who has been practicing and teaching for a long time.

Check out the space. Look for rooms that are spacious and well ventilated. Plenty of props sticky mats, straps, foam bricks, blankets and bolsters are a good sign, too. Ideally, yoga rooms are quiet, but that may not be the case in a gym setting where students have to contend with loud music and clanking weight machines.

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## **Yoga for Modern City Life: Yoga Helps Ease Modern Stress**

For Gail Stuart, who is finishing a beginner's series, yoga is an antidote to the stress of her job at the Medical University of South Carolina, where she works with psychiatric research. You just walk through the whole process, and you feel yourself slipping away. It's a different workout, she says, a welcome alternative to aerobics or exercise machines, which remind her of a torture chamber.

Yoga is the most prominent form of the burgeoning mind-body health movement, which includes tai chi, qigong and other meditative forms of exercise.

The practice of yoga should integrate every aspect of human existence. While many of modern Western practitioners focus on the physical asanas, for others, yoga is an all-encompassing way of life and a path to bliss.

Considering yoga's lofty goals, it's delightfully simple and can be done anywhere, anytime. Taken to its extreme, yoga encompasses everything from a moral code and dietary practices to deep meditation. Most commonly, though, it's a combination of asanas, pranayama (breathing exercises) and some meditation.

Yoga would be an effective and relatively cheap substitute for many anxious and stressed patients, although they would probably also need to be motivated to become physically fit.

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## **Yoga for Modern City Life: Yoga is now a Lifestyle**

Is it any surprise models are wrapping their wrists in mala beads, fashion designers are heading off to India for yoga retreats and there's a new line of active wear that takes its name from the Sanskrit mantra om.

To the uninitiated, yoga is pretzel-like poses and a dim memory of the Beatles visiting the Maharishi in the 1960s.

Gurmukh Kaur, the Center for Living's white-turbaned founder, travels by limo -- in a blaze of camera strobes -- with one of her students, singer Courtney Love.

What she does is kundalini yoga, Ms. Love told a reporter covering the bash for fashion-bible Women's Wear Daily. It's better for me than Prozac -- and the clothes are nice, too.

Ms. Love is hardly the only celebrity singing the praises of yoga -- or helping to catapult the 5,000-year-old practice onto the cutting edge.

Yoga Zone, a hip New York yoga studio with a half-hour show weekdays on cable's Health Network, has an entire catalog dedicated to the joy of yoga. In addition to the predictable range of videotapes, nonslip mats and meditation cushions, there are multiple pages of clothing and accessories.

Cotton-Lycra hipsters are the definitive Yoga Zone look for practice and beyond. Spaghetti-strap camisoles and halter tops with subtle embroidered logos come in black, slate, garnet, moss green and other quiet but current colors.

Even the jewelry has a fashion angle: Pendant necklaces with the Chinese symbol for clarity or the Sanskrit symbol for om are crafted by the hot fashion duo Me & Ro.

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### **Yoga for Women: Basic Yoga Lessons for Women**

If a woman wants a healthy way of life devoid of any strain and stress, she should start her day with yoga.

First things first, when you roll out of your bed, sit onto a mat on the floor and hug your knees to your chest. Then raise your legs in the air and stay bottoms up until your head clears. Next stand up and drop your forehead to your shins until you feel ready to tackle the toothbrush and get on with your day.

Waking up doesn't have to consist of pouring coffee down your gullet to shock yourself alive.

Many women pile up an array of small violences against themselves from the moment they wake up - caffeine, cigarettes, abrasive exercises or no exercise at all. Lots of faddish fitness programs today have this violent approach - do 50 leg raises or pound your body jogging on the pavement or jump around to a rhythm not of your own making.

Your approach to fitness and well-being and to life in general should be nonviolent one - working smoothly with concentration and determination at your own pace without competing with anyone else. Don't be ruthless with yourself and you won't be ruthless with other people.

Your routine should ideally center on 28 postures drawn from the 5,000-year-old technique whose name comes from the Sanskrit for sun, moon and join together. The exercises should range from deep breathing to pretzel-like stretches.

Yoga is strenuous, but not painful, and it gives every inch of your body a terrific workout.

Yoga proves particularly helpful in strengthening a body plagued by injury.

Yoga helps you maintain flexibility, build strength and muscle definition and even. Try spending 60 to 90 minutes on your yoga routine, before breakfast, five to six days a week.

Follow the basics mentioned here to have a healthy and balanced life:

Avoid the big seduction to only go with your strong points - like weight-lifting if you've got great muscles. It's the thing that's hardest for you that you need to work on the most

Don't space out during workouts. Use that time to have a private conversation with yourself: 'How do I feel physically, mentally.' 'How is my balance and coordination today.' 'Is there something I should pay special attention to.'

Practice yoga in the early morning or early evening at least one hour after a light meal or three to four hours after a main meal. If you are hungry before practice, try tea, milk or fruit juice.

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## **Yoga for Women: Before you Start**

The following yoga poses can be done anytime, anywhere, or as part of another workout. Always warm up for a few minutes with some walking, marching or similar activity until your body and muscles feel loose and warm.

Breathe deeply and fully while holding the poses, breathing from your lower belly and diaphragm rather than holding your breath in your chest. In yoga a breath cycle is one inhale and one exhale.

Do the poses in a tranquil environment. Music, if used, should be tranquil and peaceful. Move to your own limits.

### Yoga for Women: Exercises

**WARRIOR III POSE:** Start in the Mountain Pose with the heels slightly apart, big toes touching, legs straight, chest lifted, pelvis in a neutral position. Placing hands on hips, step back with your right foot so just your right toes touch the floor, all of your body weight on your left foot.

Keep your right leg extended in a straight line as you start to lean forward from your hips. Balance the length of your body, from your right heel to your fingertips, over your left leg until your torso is parallel to the floor. Keep your weight evenly distributed through inner and outer heel, with hips level. Begin with 5 breath cycles and progress to 15.

Lift your torso up and return to the Mountain Pose; repeat on the other side.

### PLANK POSE, SIDE-PLANK POSE

Begin on your hands and knees, hands directly under shoulders, knees under hips. Move feet back until the legs are straight and you're balancing on your toes, feet together. Keep the shoulders pulled back and down, arms straight. This is the Plank Pose.

Squeezing the ankles together, roll onto the outer edge of the left foot, keeping feet stacked, legs straight. Lift the right hand toward ceiling then look up at it. Let your abs support your body without clamping and crunching. Then lower right hand to floor, rolling down toward the right, and return to the Plank Pose. Repeat on other side. Hold each pose for 5 breath cycles.

Yoga for Women: Hold that Pose

So, how can yoga help reshape your waist.

In simple terms, by requiring you to move - and hold - your torso muscles as a unit. Rather than isolating your abdominal muscles as you do in crunches, yoga poses help to lengthen your overall torso, creating a feeling that is both centered and strong.

Think of your torso as a long vessel through which numerous muscles interact to keep you looking lean. Your transversus abdominis, the deepest abdominal muscle, works with the others to hold in your lower belly. Your erector spinae, the muscles that attach on your spine, straighten your posture and can make you feel (and appear) taller, while your rectus abdominis and obliques are the strong and flexible muscles that allow your limbs to move freely.

Yoga for Women: How to Gain a Shapely Waist through Yoga

The size of the waist is an indication of overall fitness for many people. Most health experts agree that a smaller waist is healthier than a big one. The reasoning behind this is that increases in fat around the waist usually result in increased health risks such as diabetes, high cholesterol and blood pressure.

In evolutionary and biological terms, a small waist signifies youth and vitality. But doing endless workouts of crunches alone will not allow you to achieve that Venus-like waist of your dreams. You will need to supplement specific waist-orientated exercises with ones from various disciplines.

Specifically you will need to work the inner girdle of muscles - commonly known as the core muscles - with slow abdominal exercises that work very deep into these muscle groups.

While usually associated with building flexibility, some specific exercises from yoga-based workouts also target the underlying core muscles around the waist.

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### **Yoga on the Net**

At one time it seemed that yoga was little more than a dated hippie fad, rather like the lava lamp. But now this ancient health system is back in vogue.

Celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Madonna, and Julia Roberts and Sting are not shy about advocating the mental and physical benefits of the discipline.

It is cool to carry around a little purple mat and tie yourself up in knots in local gyms and draughty church halls. It seems yoga is everywhere, and nowhere is it more omnipresent than on the net.

Should you wish to learn more about Sting's views on the subject, for instance, you might care to read the in-depth interview available at the White Lotus website.

You'll find a glossily professional web page which features authoritative articles on the many different forms of yoga - and the debate about which is the best.

You can also access a shop selling books and videos, or click through selection of celebrity interviews.

Share the well-illustrated interview with Sting, in which he expresses regret at not having started yoga earlier. But he adds that, if anything, the exercise seems to be reversing the ageing process.

This view is echoed by fellow megastar Madonna. Indeed, the title song, Ray Of Light, in her best-selling album incorporates a traditional yoga chant.

If you are moved to discover more details, Roots And Wings, a 'yoga, bodywork and natural healing centre' will be happy to provide you with the original Sanskrit text of that chant.

Roots And Wings is largely geared to selling yoga products, but you'll also find articles, discussion groups and a search engine for locating those all important Sanskrit lyrics (just type in Madonna).

Another site, called Evolution, describes itself as an online yoga magazine, and although it can be a little graphic-heavy and slow, it's a snazzy and informative creation.

The visitor is offered enticements such as a free email newsletter, meditation advice, chants and even recipes.

Should you find Evolution's animated yoga girl icon annoyingly limber, you might be tempted to compete with her by practising a selection of yoga postures yourself.

Evolution allows you to call up these postures on your screen.

It seems that cyberspace is not yet the proper place to learn the subtleties of this ancient discipline: for that you'll still need to take a traditional class with a teacher.

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### **Yoga Videos Aren't All Equal at Getting Out the Kinks**

Yoga used to be the kind of thing someone's eccentric aunt did - a woman with a braid wrapped around her head who entertained the children by putting her foot behind her neck.

I tried screening three different videos on a day when my neck and shoulder muscles were tighter than last year's jeans. I had knots the size of Rhode Island that had been there for weeks.

Jane Fonda's Yoga Exercise (A.Vision) relaxed them. Kathy Smith's New Yoga (BodyVision) warmed them up. Three hours later, after falling under the reassuring southern spell of actress Dixie Carter's Unworkout (MCA Universal), they melted away.

Here's how it went:

An all-natural Jane Fonda appeared on a set that looks like a craggy moonscape, wearing plain red leotards and tights, and sporting a French braid down to her hips. (It's a hair extension, but what do we care.)

She demonstrated the classical Sun Salutation, a choreographed yoga routine traditionally used to greet the day, her huge Ted Turner diamond gleaming in the spotlight.

Then she asked us to join her in a warm-up, several rounds of the Sun Salutation, and a relaxation and breath awareness segment, 60 minutes all told.

Yoga is slow, I decided, slow enough that I have time to examine the webs between my toes and the lint on the carpet while holding each pose. While nearly standing on my head, I meditated on the most profound of Jane's statements: When in doubt, breathe.

After the relaxation segment, my thoughts switched to her final message: I am relaxed, and I will carry this feeling with me.

She said this hour would help me stretch, tone and energize my body. At that moment I felt lethargic, noodled, ready for lunch. The knots are still there.

Kathy Smith also appeared in a red leotard and tights and urged me to do the workout on an empty stomach, preferably just before dinner. She worked with Rod Stryker, yoga instructor of the stars, to update the ancient disciplines and merge them into a workout for fitness fans.

Kathy stood on a raised pylon as she led a more athletic version of the Sun Salutation, a half dozen other poses and a meditation, 60 minutes total.

The great thing about yoga, I'm learning, is the great names attached to each exercise: the downward dog, the cobra, the plank.

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