

# Stressbuster

## Yoga offers quick relief from tension

By Susan Steinmueller  
staff writer

Has the stress of a fast-paced life left you feeling a bit tired and scattered lately?

Maybe you should try yoga. The discipline of yoga aims at health and unity of body, mind and breath, and practitioners say it means to "make whole."

Developed in India thousands of years ago, yoga is enjoying a resurgence of popularity perhaps because it provides quick relief from the pressures and tensions of the modern world.

Karen Farkas, a Livonia resident and yoga instructor at Livonia and Farmington for 15 years, compares a yoga session to a "decompression chamber" from the outside world.

"On the one hand, it's very, very relaxing, and on the other hand, it's very energizing," she said. "You feel both at the same time."

People in high-pressure jobs, she said, "are exactly the kinds of people who would benefit the most from yoga."

Doctors and chiropractors have referred patients with insomnia, nervous tension and high blood pressure to yoga classes, she said. Yoga's relaxation techniques also can be applied in daily life.

"At work occasionally if I find myself getting tense, I can do a stretch that's kind of subtle — basically you can do it at your desk, and no one's any the wiser — and it helps relieve some of the tension," said three-year yoga student Scott Tyler, a Rochester Hills resident.

YOGA'S POPULARITY also is increasing as people become more familiar with it.

"Yoga is finally being demystified. The Beatles guru-type era is over," said Mariana Smith, a Troy resident and full-time yoga instructor who has classes in Rochester, Troy, Franklin, West Bloomfield and Sterling Heights.

Actress Raquel Welch's videotape on yoga and the marriage of President Reagan's daughter Patti to a yoga instructor also have helped make the Eastern discipline known to Americans.

Hatha yoga is the main yoga discipline offered by community education programs.

It is concerned with health and longevity, and unlike other branches of yoga, deals mainly with physical exercises, although meditation usually is included.

But points out Farkas, "Yoga was developed to keep the body in top shape, so you can develop your mind. The greatest gift that I think yoga has to offer to the West is not physical health but mental health."

A YOGA STUDENT needs a mat, blanket and exercise clothes. It is, she said, a "non-vanity class."

Smith said her typical class is 1½ hours long. It starts with centering or "pulling yourself in and being in the class, letting go of the day."

It is followed by warm-up stretches and postures.

Although there are more than 800,000 postures, most instructors teach about 30 basic postures and their variations, she said.

Her class concludes with deep relaxation and meditation.

Some yoga students practice yoga to enhance their fitness and



Instructor Mariana Smith (left) of Troy leads Jena Brant and Janice Gillihan, both of Rochester Hills, in a yoga class at the Rochester Community House.

tone for other sports, from golfing to professional football.

Farkas said she started yoga in 1970 to improve her jogging after reading an article.

"I always do a yoga routine before I leave for running, and I've never had a running injury in 17 years of running. I credit that to the yoga stretching," said Farkas, who runs three or four miles three days a week and practices yoga on the other days.

"Yoga is very concerned with holding the body correctly," Farkas said. "It carries over into sports, so you use the body in the most efficient way with the least loss of energy."

It gives one "the ability to use the body in its full possible range of motion" and teaches several controlled breathing techniques, which are helpful in practicing sports, she said.

Although a yoga class can provide a challenging workout, yoga's benefits do not include peak cardiovascular fitness, Farkas said.

BU YOGA is not simply learning postures, breathing and meditation. Smith was chairman of the recent Yoga Day at the Auburn Hills campus of Oakland Community College, sponsored by the Yoga Association of Greater Detroit. "Hatha yoga at all levels" and related classes were offered, dealing with areas including massage, nutrition, positive thinking and self-healing principles.

There are no "black belts" in yoga.

"You never graduate from hatha yoga," said Smith. "Yoga is forever. Because we are non-goal-oriented, it is a path that you are on forever, if you are interested."

Smith said that yoga is "for everybody." There are no age barriers, and people of all body conditions may practice yoga, she said, because yoga is tailored to one's needs.

"I can't envision my life without yoga," Smith added.

"You start to realize that your body is unique and the better you treat it the better it will treat you in the long run," said Tyler.



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Janice Gillihan of Rochester Hills strikes a yoga peace pose during a class taught by Mariana Smith.

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