

YOGA

NATURAL LIVING



Aromatherapy basics

EATING VEGETABLE CENTRIC

INTERVIEW - BRYAN KEST

YOGA IN POOR COMMUNITIES

BIKRAM YOGA

SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS WITH

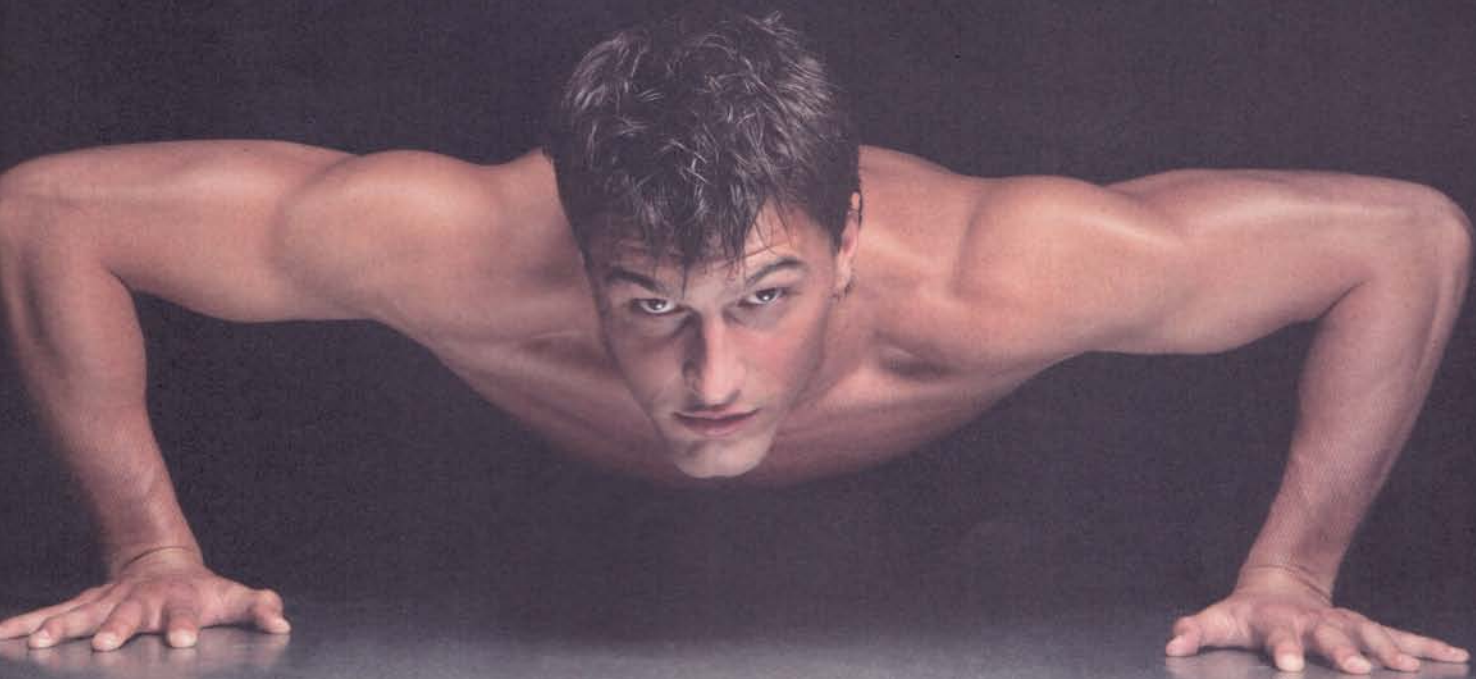
sleep



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yoga packaged FOR MEN

Let's face it - yoga in the UK is predominantly practiced by women. Men are rare sightings in group classes, akin to some natural phenomena meriting a visit from David Attenborough. Why is this? After all, yoga was originally devised by men for men, and remained an almost exclusively male domain for the last four-thousand years. So why have western men failed to take to yoga the way women have? And perhaps more importantly to those of us that consider yoga to be a fundamental part of our lives, how can we change men's perceptions and get them on the mat? To convince them, yoga's benefits must be 'packaged' in terms of what they deem most important; namely sports, work, and sex (hopefully not in that order). Yoga can bring benefits to each of these areas, and here's how.



AVOIDING RECURRENCE OF BACK SPORTS/TRAINING

Professional athletes and trainers have, across the board, started to incorporate yoga into their training regimens. For example, the Welsh rugby team have taken up yoga as part of their World Cup preparations. This is a clear indication that yoga benefits are becoming recognised as a great supplement to any sport or workout programme. Not surprising since it increases your concentration, self-awareness, flexibility, strength and balance, which are all of benefit in most sports. Most people with back trouble have at some point been recommended by their doctors to do basic yoga exercises in order to assist their healing process. Continuing yoga practice has the benefits of strengthening and lengthening ligaments in the back, alleviating postural misalignments and back pain associated with injuries. Two very simple yet effective asanas for massaging the spine are cat and cow pose. Yoga can dramatically reduce the recovery time associated with sports injuries, as well as preventing future re-injury. For example, runners with nagging knee or ankle problems benefit tremendously from yoga through stabilisation of the joints and the development of the surrounding muscles. There are so many different types of yoga available that men may not realise how much of a cardiovascular workout it can provide. Sure, there are slower moving classes like Yin yoga that focus on really deepening the stretches and improving flexibility, but there are also many forms of yoga that offer an arduous workout that will certainly contribute to a weight loss plan and all over body toning. Ashtanga vinyasa classes with repeated sun salutations can be very physically demanding. Throw a few arm balances into the mix and you are sure to gain muscles in places you never knew existed! And of course there's the increasingly popular Bikram yoga, which consists of 26 postures repeated twice in a 40C heated room full of sweating bodies.

WORK

Yoga is a powerful way to calm the mind. It encourages you to focus inward and leave the frustrations and strains of everyday life behind - a great stress reliever. Most people

experience a sense of clarity and serenity after a yoga class, even after their first session. Those that have been doing yoga long enough know that it is primarily about the breath. It is this connection with the breath that calms the nervous system and therefore the mind. Breathing incorrectly can lead to many issues - exhaustion, lack of ability to focus, anxiety, increased stress and raised blood pressure. How we breathe affects everything in our day-to-day lives. We should be breathing deep from the abdomen not from the chest, as men often do. Shallow breaths from the chest tell the brain we are in danger and initiate stress responses. Breathing from the abdomen, on the other hand, tells the brain not to panic. By lowering stress levels, yoga strengthens the immune system. It also conditions the lungs and respiratory tract, stimulating the lymphatic system to expel toxins from the body, and bringing fresh oxygenated blood to the organs to guarantee their peak function. What makes yoga different to other forms of exercise is that it focuses on everything, not just one, or a few, specific parts of the body.

Meditation is about quieting the thoughts and focusing the mind. Training the mind to 'let go' of trivial and taxing thoughts is a powerful discipline that has substantial benefits on the mind and body. Energy wasted on worrying and stress can now be put to better use.

Yoga requires nothing more than loose clothing and a mat which most studios provide. Classes are becoming increasingly accessible with yoga studios popping up everywhere and most gyms now offering classes. And it's not expensive, with some teachers even offering donation or 'karma' yoga. Some may feel too embarrassed to go to a group class because they are inflexible; they can always begin their practice at home, or indeed in the office with a private tutor, DVD or even the increasingly popular Wii. Some companies even offer 'corporate yoga' as a supplementary employee perk, obviously these companies feel yoga is a worthwhile expenditure for enhancing employee productivity.

SEX

Many prescription and over-the-counter drugs for health conditions such as high blood pressure, depression and

prostate issues can affect sexual performance. Yoga can help with these conditions and may therefore be able to prevent the use of medications that affect a man's hormones, nerves or blood circulation. Many men (and women) suffer from high blood pressure which can lead to increased risk of heart attacks and strokes. Yoga is recommended by doctors to help reduce risks of these health conditions. Forward bends improve circulation around the spine, allowing blood to move more freely and therefore lessening the pressure on your arteries. Inversions like shoulderstand and headstand allow you to breathe more easily, which have a calming effect and help regulate blood pressure.

Yoga therapy is recognised by the medical profession as helping with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and mental health issues. It helps individuals to connect with who they really are, as well as changing negative breathing patterns, and many say it raises serotonin levels. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer amongst men, affecting 35,000 men a year in the UK alone. Yoga can help as it stimulates the liver meridian and makes men more

aware of their pelvic areas in terms of muscular control. Asanas such as navasana (boat pose), dhanurasana (bow pose), virasana (hero pose) and savangasana (shoulderstand) are very helpful for this according to experts. Kegel exercises, which will strengthen the urinary sphincter, are excellent for preventing prostate problems. Warrior pose and triangle pose also help to activate the liver meridian, a major determinant in prostate health.

Yoga is an invaluable addition to any man's workout regime. So women, as the torch bearers for yoga in the UK, let's start sharing the wonders of yoga with the men in our lives. After all, not only they benefit: we can enjoy the pleasure of having partners and friends with the mental and physical balance that yoga engenders.

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