

## HEALTHY LIVING

## A serene boom

Yoga stretches beyond old limits to new fans

BY HELENA OLIVIERO

Cox News Service

Yoga for rockers. And yoga for people who use rockers. Hot yoga. Cold yoga. Stone yoga. Yoga for moms and babies and yoga for guys too stiff to stretch.

Even as the economy twists us all in knots, this mind-body discipline created millennia ago in India appears to be thriving, with more kinds of classes offering new adherents a soothing respite from today's troubles.

Yoga, an ancient Eastern discipline weaving together a series of static poses held over a period of time with controlled breathing and meditative focus, took off in earnest in the United States about two decades ago. Until recent years, though, yoga devotees seemed to be mostly women who looked liked classically trained ballet dancers on vegan diets.

But as celebrities and baby boomers began turning to it to help combat aging, the popularity of yoga exploded. These days, classes are taught everywhere, from yoga studios to senior centers to public schools. And in many cases, the number of rubber mats are on the rise, with many studios saying their numbers are steady or even up.

"People always say at the beginning of the year: I am going to get healthy," said Ann Ritter, a longtime yoga instructor who teaches at Callanwolde Fine Arts Center and at a new studio in Atlanta. She has seen her enrollment double during the past several months. "But this year, there's an extra incentive. People think it's absolutely essential to stay calm and reduce stress."

Larry Rosenberg, training specialist for Arizona-based Dahn Yoga (which has six studios in Atlanta) says emerging research demonstrating a connection between stress and many health woes including heart problems and high blood pressure also has helped buoy yoga into mainstream.

The Crunch Fitness chain offers 39 varieties of yoga, including stone yoga (incorporating crystals), buff yoga

(focused on strength training), even a naptime yoga. The club will soon unveil an "antigravity yoga class" that uses a soft, hammock-like trapeze to mimic a floating-like feeling.

**Mats are mobbed**

"It's my time to

ing to Yahoo.com, the number of online searches for "Free Yoga Exercises Online" was up 59 percent during a recent 30-day period.

Improving overall health was the No. 1 reason cited by people practicing yoga in early

"At first, I thought, 'This is just stretching and a whole bunch of ladies.' I just didn't see how I could get any benefit out of it," he said.

When he started, Mills, who stands more than 6 feet and weighs 270 pounds, couldn't do a basic Lotus pose, which involves sitting on the floor with legs crossed.

But the personal chef, who says he is facing a major slowdown in business these days, said he remembered feeling more at ease after the class at Yoga Hive. He now goes twice a week, clad in gray basketball pants and toting a purple yoga mat.

"I used to be a worrier, but I don't do that anymore," he said. "I just breathe. ... I walk this earth differently now."

In his family budget, he said, "yoga" is the second line item, after food.

**Fun and flexibility**

At a children's bookstore in Decatur, Ga., the class "Reading Comes Alive With Yoga" does just that. On a recent Monday morning, a group of preschoolers barked like dogs and did the downward dog pose every time "George," star of Jules Feiffer's book "Bark George," barked in the book.

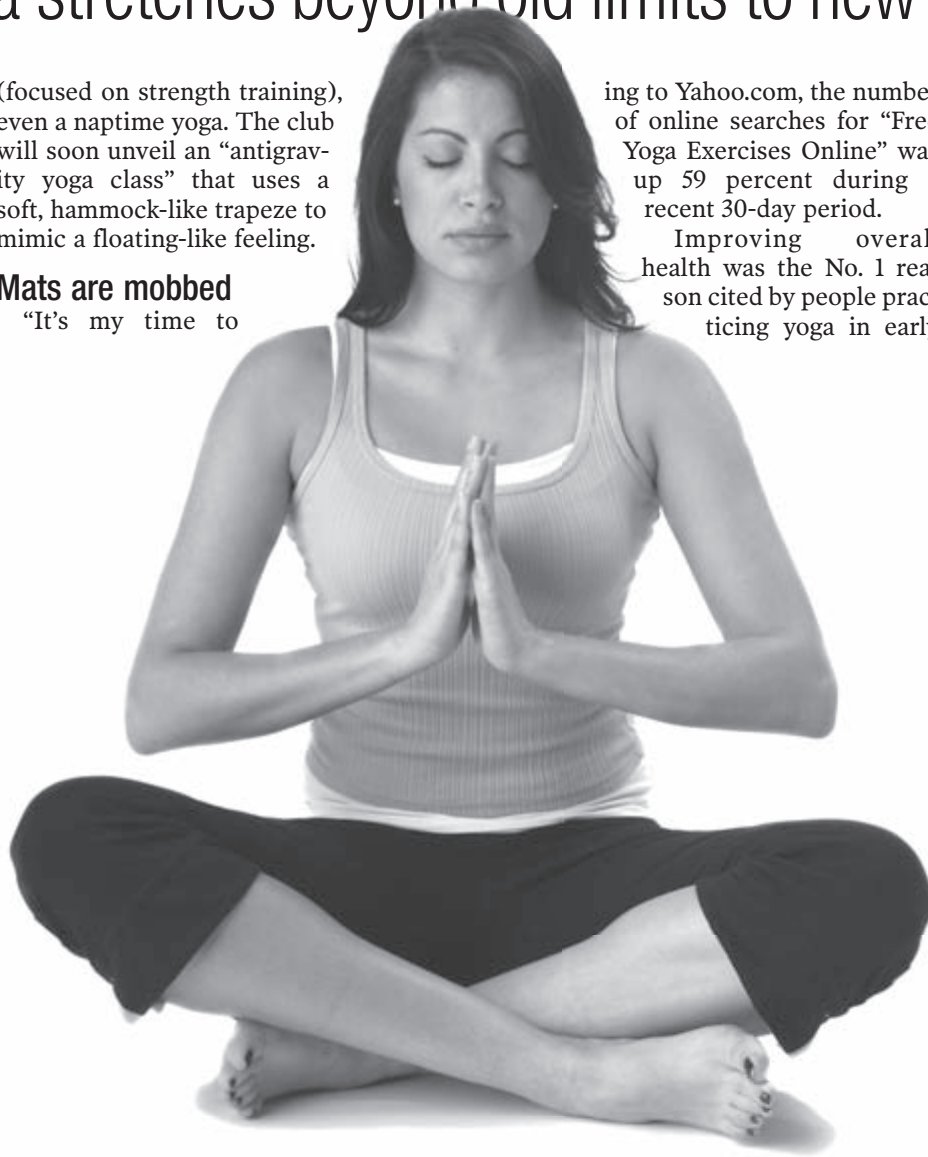
And at The Goddard School in Marietta, Ga., groups of preschoolers erupt like volcanoes and yell out, "go away sadness." They also take deep, sweet breaths from empty cinnamon jars.

Yvonne Beazer, who is 70, is glad to see so many youngsters get into yoga. She has been practicing for more than 30 years and credits it with allowing her to dance salsa. It also soothes the aches and pains of aging and helps in coping with stressful situations. Her home was recently burglarized and she could barely wait to do swan dives at her Monday morning class.

"I just knew it would make feel better and calm me down," she said. "And it did."

And while surveys show that achieving greater flexibility is no longer a top reason for yoga, she says it definitely should not be dismissed.

"My husband likes it because I am more flexible," she said. "And let's just say it makes our house a happy home." ■



unwind," said 25-year-old Chris Iglinski, who works in real estate and started going to yoga about three months ago. "I run and go on a bike and push myself physically, but with yoga, it's more internal, and after a class, I definitely feel more relaxed."

About 16 million Americans now practice yoga, and it's estimated almost \$6 billion was spent on yoga classes and products in 2008, almost double the amount spent in 2003.

Even those without cash to spare are turning to the discipline long championed for uncluttering the mind and providing a feeling of serenity. Accord-

ing to a Yoga Journal study released recently. In 2003, the most common incentive was to increase flexibility.

**Seeking peace of mind**

At the Yoga Hive in southwest Atlanta, owner Mechelle Davis has watched a steady stream of newbies walk through the thick, cream-colored curtains and take a seat in a room decorated with a waterfall scene.

Some of the yoga newbies include 46-year-old Renard Mills, a former college football player who checked out a yoga presentation on a whim last year.

## Healthy habits lower the risk for heart disease

BY MARJIE GILLIAM

Cox News Service

According to the American Heart Association, it is estimated that one in every three women die of heart disease.

The choices we make each day impact our health in so many ways, including the amount of exercise we get, the number of hours we sleep and how well we handle stress. Some choices may not result in serious consequences, while others are life-changing.

But what if the seemingly unimportant choices were the ones that mattered most, such as opting to take the stairs and not the elevator, or choosing baked instead of fried?

Women are dying of heart disease at the rate of almost one per minute. No longer considered a problem that affects primarily men, heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women ages 20 and older. Thankfully, it

also is largely preventable by taking early steps to keep your heart healthy. Women simply have to choose to act.

The "Go Red For Women" campaign was launched as a way to build awareness regarding heart disease among women. And although more women die of cardiovascular disease than the next five causes of death combined, including all forms of cancer, only one in five women believes this disease is her greatest health threat.

How can your choices make a difference? Research has shown that women who decide to "Go Red" are more likely to make healthy choices. These choices include maintaining a healthy weight, becoming more active, choosing a healthier diet and knowing their "numbers," such as blood pressure, waist measurement, cholesterol levels and family history.

Although it isn't always easy when it comes to changing bad habits, taking even small steps in the right direction can

make a difference. The American Heart Association's mission is to build healthier lives that are free from cardiovascular disease and stroke. It offers many programs, activities and suggestions to help do just that:

- By visiting GoRedForWomen.org you can choose to take the Go Red Heart CheckUp to find out your 10-year risk of heart disease or stroke. The Web site also invites women to inspire and connect with one another by sharing their own stories about the heart-healthy choices they're making.

- It is not uncommon for women to put their own health last while taking good care of those around them. Starting this year, make a point to schedule a doctor's appointment every year to get a complete blood screening. The Go Red For Women Web site provides a free download: "What to Know Before Your Doctor Visit."

- The old saying goes, "Use it or lose

it." Exercise is one of the most important things you can do for the health of your heart, so choose to move, not sit. A free 12-week physical activity and nutrition program is included on the site, and you can customize it to fit your lifestyle.

- Choose to eat baked, not fried, foods. Cooking tips and wonderful recipes from the Go Red For Women Recipe Collection cookbook are available at ShopGoRed.org.

- Don't smoke. Instead, educate yourself on the ways that smoking increases your risk for heart disease. If you want to quit smoking but are not able to do it on your own, consult your physician. Often, smoking cessation classes are available through hospitals and wellness clinics.

For more information, visit [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org). ■

*Marjie Gilliam is an International Sports Sciences Association Master certified personal trainer and fitness consultant.*