

Bikram Yoga

Some Like it Hot!

Heated Yoga is the hottest health trend on the Northshore

by Peter Sklivas

"Why would anyone do yoga in a heated room?" As a yoga instructor at Yoga Passion, I hear this question every day from newcomers to this popular style of exercise called Bikram Yoga. "Is the idea to melt the fat off my body?" Well, not exactly, but some students have reported that side-effect.

Heat is used for two reasons: First, students' bodies become much more flexible in the heat. This yoga sequence is designed to be physically challenging. In the heat students are able to get into postures which might otherwise look impossible. The inventor of this yoga, Bikram Choudhury, introduced heat into his yoga classes while teaching in Japan. Bikram discovered that using heat practically eliminated the incidence of injury and enabled students to get into and work the postures more effectively. In so doing, students attained breakthrough levels of flexibility, strength, and balance which they can harness off the yoga mat.

The second reason for the heat is that Bikram found that students released deeply held toxins from the cellular level of the body in the heated environment. Conducting extensive research which demonstrated that his style of yoga facilitated the release of toxins from organs, muscles, and ligaments, Bikram was sponsored by the American Medical Association to visit this country and share his findings. Upon his arrival Bikram was greeted with such a groundswell of interest that he decided to offer classes.

In Beverly Hills, where he operates his yoga studio, Bikram has helped many thousands of Hollywood celebrities, athletes, and ordinary people reach high levels of performance, extend their careers, and heal their bodies. People such as Shirley McClain, Raquel Welch, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Madonna, and Michael Jackson are a small sample of the Who's Who roster which Bikram has collected over the years among his students.

Bikram continues to travel around the world teaching his unique sequence of 26 yoga postures. As he likes to say, "Never too old, never too late, to start from scratch and start all over again." From personal experience Bikram knows what it is to recover from catastrophic injury. A competitive weightlifter, Bikram injured his knee as a result of a spotting error while training. After European doctors told him that he would never walk again, Bikram returned to his yoga teacher in Calcutta who instructed him to resume his yoga practice. It was in the daily performance of these yoga postures that Bikram healed and rebuilt his leg and went on to become one of the world's foremost yoga experts.

For the first time on the Northshore, Bikram's Yoga classes are now available. Students come to classes with a variety of goals ranging from relieving arthritis symptoms, gaining greater range of movement, reshaping the physical body, developing whole body strength and balance. I warn every new student that they will be humbled in their first class. This class will offer you the workout of your life! Your body will love you for doing it! And you'll probably discover a newfound love for your body! What's more students are surprised at how quickly they experience positive results. Numerous students have reported an elimination of chronic creaks and aches in their bodies after only three classes. Others talk about building strength in places where they didn't even know muscles existed. One student who received a double-lung transplant reports no longer suffering from chronic migraine

headaches since she started her weekly Bikram regiment.

The following are other frequently asked questions.

Q: Exactly how hot is the room?

A: We keep the temperature at 90+ degrees throughout the class. Occasionally the heat tops 100. But the air temperature is cooler near the floor. While exercising in the heat sounds unorthodox, newcomers quickly recognize how much more supple their bodies have become. I encourage them to think of the heat as their best friend.

Q: Is the routine the same every time?

A: Yes. Part of Bikram's genius comes from designing the flow so that one posture opens the specific areas of the body in preparation for the next posture. By utilizing the same flow every class, Bikram's yoga has a much shorter learning curve than other rigorous styles of yoga.

Q: Is Bikram's Yoga the same as Power Yoga?

A: No. Power Yoga is derived from the Ashtanga School which emphasizes series of repetitive flowing movements. Both styles are vigorous, challenging, and offer wonderful benefits. As a yoga instructor, I personally prefer Bikram's Yoga because of the reduced incidence of injuries. Power yoga places inordinate strain in certain areas such as the lower back, wrists, and ankles.

Q: Is Bikram's Yoga only recommended for experienced yoga students?

A: Not at all. Most of our students at Yoga Passion are newcomers. What has been especially gratifying is teaching people who don't have "yoga bodies" that they can do Bikram's Yoga and achieve impressive results. A great misnomer in our society is that yoga is only for tall thin muscular women and men. At Yoga Passion we teach students with all sorts of body types. The important thing is the student's commitment to attaining goals for which yoga is well suited, such as body fitness, releasing tension, or experiencing peace of mind.

Q: How many times per week do you recommend doing Bikram's Yoga?

A: Every person's body needs and time constraints are different. Some students attend classes four times per week. Others come once per week. Some students mix both Bikram and Kripalu yoga into their routine. Your body will tell you how often to come to class. The important question is: Will you listen? Anyone who feels as though they are starting all over again every time they come to class is not coming often enough. What we emphasize in our classes is taking satisfaction in the small victories which come from repeatedly doing the yoga. By committing to a regular weekly yoga practice, students of all ages create the framework for changing their entire attitude towards their bodies and enjoying the results.