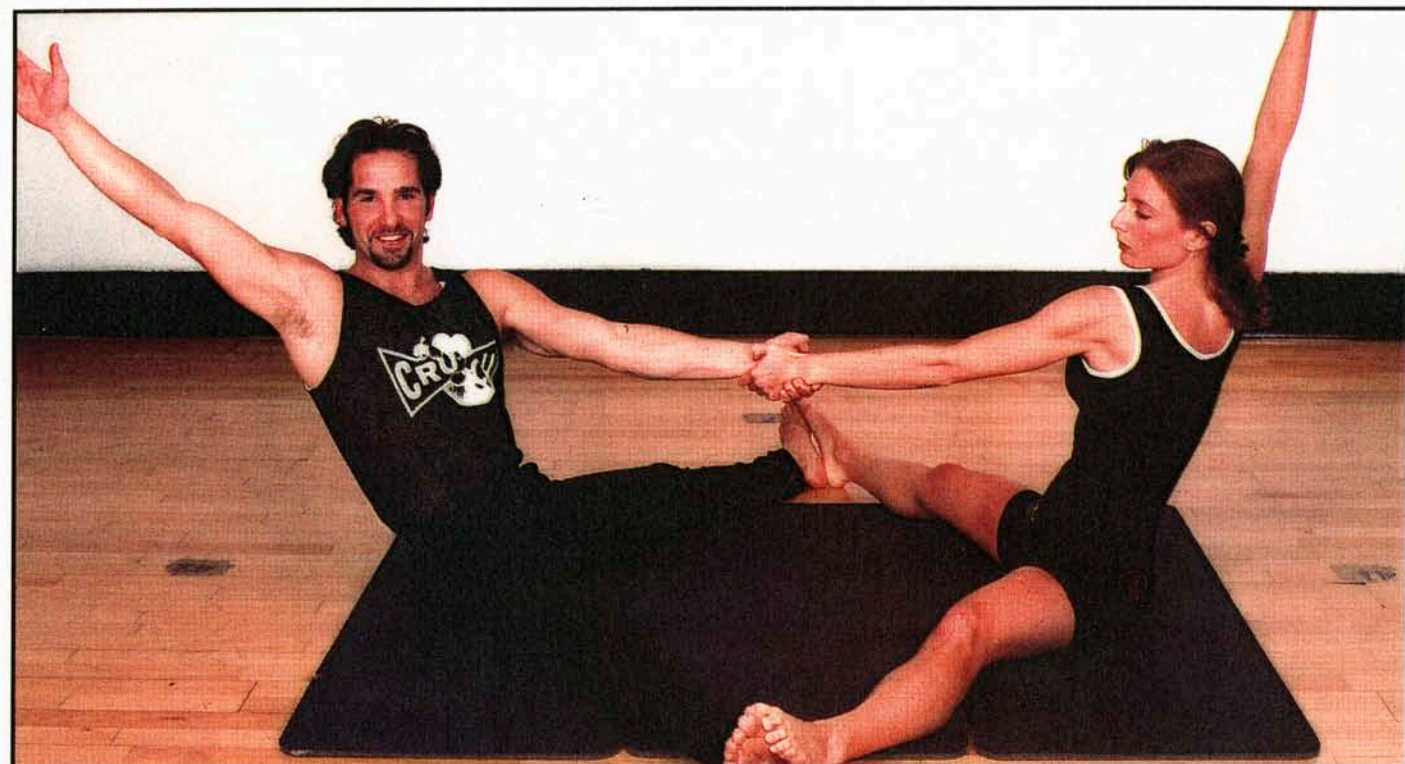


Yoga With a Twist

Contact Yoga for Mind and Body



When you hear the word “yoga,” most of you picture people sitting on the floor with their legs crossed, pinching their thumbs and index fingers together and chanting “Om.” I’ve never been interested in New Age philosophies, so when I was told about contact yoga — something I’ve never heard of before — I have to admit I was a little hesitant to pursue it. However, being open-minded, and in search of a new way to relieve stress, I decided to give it a try.

I was referred to Dr. Joseph Caraccilo, a chiropractor in New York City who had practiced a form of yoga called Astanga with Beryl Bender Birch, a highly respected teacher of yoga. Caraccilo then learned contact yoga from the yogi (Nateshvar, also called Tesh) who created the discipline with his son. Caraccilo is one of the few people trained in contact yoga by Tesh himself.

Unlike other forms of yoga where you assume a series of postures independently, contact yoga is one-on-one — the instructor leads and assists you through a series of positions where you are lifted and suspended. The positions written by **Rachel Grumman**

range from classic yoga stances to ones that are based on ballet movements and gymnastics.

Contact yoga is just what it says: There is actual contact between instructor and clients, so if you’re shy about your body this is a good way to get over it. While you’re being suspended in mid-air, you may fear that your instructor is going to drop you — at least I did — but he won’t. You need to learn to trust your instructor — this will help you relax and get the most out of these exercises.

As with other forms of yoga, breathing is key to relaxing, and it also creates heat which allows

your muscles to become more flexible.

Don’t worry if you’ve never done yoga before. While it helps to be in good shape, yoga is one of the few forms of exercise that’s good for everyone. Yoga, an ancient Hindu practice that means “union,” is a complete body workout — it stretches and strengthens the body.

“I think it’s an optimal form of exercise because it keeps the muscles flexible,” Caraccilo says, “and at the same time it keeps the muscles strong, the perfect combination for preventing injuries.”

Yoga elongates your muscles, which results in a stronger, leaner, more flexible body. “Yoga is really an intense series of postures that leads to a type of physical exhaustion of the body. The end result is the calming, peaceful effect that people imagine when they think of yoga,” Caraccilo explains.

Another benefit of contact yoga is its ability to release emotional stress, which tends to lodge in certain muscles. For example, it’s been shown that women tend to hold stress in their neck and shoulders while men hold stress in their lower back area.

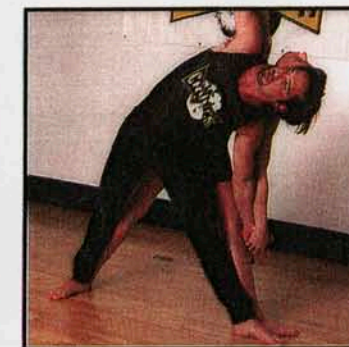
According to Caraccilo, when the body is placed in certain positions and held there, you can release that emotional stress.

“Continuous yoga practice can lead to improved balance and an increased ability to focus and concentrate,” Caraccilo says. Now what more could you ask for?

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Partner triangle. This movement is directed at the side of the body, including the arms and shoulders. By doing this stretch with an instructor, you can pull on each other’s arms for greater balance and to enhance the stretch. This exercise, and all contact yoga postures, should only be done with an experienced instructor.



Suspended back

bend. This is an advanced posture which should only be done when your back is strong and flexible. It helps induce back extension flexibility and acts as an emotional release. You may feel vulnerable in this position, but you have to relax into it while you breathe deeply. One you relax, you may experience feelings of weightlessness that are calming and soothing.

