

Health



# Big bend

**Ashtanga**

Like circuit training with weights, ashtanga requires that you move from one pose to the next without stopping.

Photos by Rex Dittman

By RACHEL GRUMMAN

## There's a yoga style for every taste

**T**HROW a stone in this city, and you'll hit a studio or gym that offers yoga classes.

But do you know your ashtanga from your bikram? They're both different forms of the ancient practice of yoga — last year's (literally) hot craze, bikram (performed in a heated room) has given way to ashtanga, which is more like circuit training.

But while trends come and go, yoga itself has been around for more than 5,000 years.

"While the practice increases flexibility, tones and builds strength, yoga is also about clearing the mind and being calm in the center of the whirlpool," says Grace Gagnon, who teaches at Equinox.

"That's why it's popular in fast-paced, high-stress environments like New York. Yoga is also a way to get in your workout and meditation at once."

Yoga has gained even more attention lately as studies laud its physical and mental health benefits — from relieving symptoms associated with cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, asthma, diabetes and migraines to easing the pain of arthritis and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Trying various classes is the best way to find which yoga style clicks with you.

"No matter what style you try, you will get something out of it," promises Gagnon.

**HATHA**

Hatha yoga is an umbrella term for any style of yoga that deals with physical movement. Just as jazz, hip-hop and disco are all music, there are several types of yoga within hatha — it's the order of the moves that makes them distinct.

And like couture, many hatha styles take their name from the yoga instructor who created the new sequence of poses, making it their own (think Tom Ford's Gucci). All the styles defined here are hatha yoga, except for kundalini.

**IYENGAR**

Named after its founder, B.K.S. Iyengar, this is sometimes called "furniture yoga" for the way it uses props to reach proper poses and align the body correctly. The props — blocks, straps and cushions — may sound kinky, but they're perfect for people who need help getting into position or sustaining it for long periods of time.

If you can't bend and reach the floor, for instance, the blocks meet you partway.

**ASHTANGA**

This is the most traditional form of yoga — and the most physically intense, which may account for its popularity.

Sometimes called power yoga, ashtanga has a set sequence of postures — but instead of pausing between each pose, you flow from one into the next without taking a break. It's like circuit training with weights in the gym.

Many classes offer a beginner's level, but even gym devotees should expect to be covered in sweat when they leave class and feel sore the next day.

"In ashtanga, you're using muscles you may normally never use," says Gagnon.

**KRIPALU**

Yogi (yoga master) Amrit Desai founded kripalu, a low-key practice of postures in an unbroken flow. A more modern strain of hatha yoga, it requires holding a posture longer to develop concentration and awareness.

Kripalu is not for Type-A personalities or perfectionists. It's a gentler practice that is about the process itself — going through the moves — rather than perfecting the postures and breathing techniques.

"As practitioners improve in kripalu, the postures become like meditation in motion," says Joseph Caraccilo, founder of Space for Wellness on the Upper East Side.

**BIKRAM**

Take relatively strenuous yoga poses and practice them in a room heated between 90 and 105 degrees, and you've got bikram yoga — and, probably, B.O., which may account for its fall-off in popularity.

The Sahara-like heat used in bikram studios is said to increase the body's ability to move and stretch without injury.

"You repeat the same sequence of postures over and over," says Caraccilo.

"The theory is that the repetition detoxifies and cleanses the body from the inside out."

**KUNDALINI**

This is the least physical yoga form of all. The name means "blissful energy," and it's based on breathing techniques and chanting.

The meditation is said to cause the dormant energy at the base of the spine to move through the rest of the body, revitalizing and restoring health.

**CONTACT YOGA**

With contact or partner yoga — a modern version of the ancient practice — two people work together to perform a series of postures.

Coupling up with a teacher or significant other can help you maintain proper alignment and balance as well as perform poses you couldn't do solo, says Caraccilo. It's also a great way to bond with your other half.

**Iyengar**



Props like straps are used to help you get into and sustain a yoga position.

**Contact Yoga**



Teaming up with a partner can help you maintain proper alignment.

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