

# The Well Being

By David Sutton



DIANA KANG

## MANLY YOGA

### Why Is It That Guys Love Bikram Yoga?

**My sister teaches yoga.** If she's really into something and derives great benefit from it, she wants you to try it. She's been pushing the benefits of yoga on me for years.

A while ago, I mentioned to her that I might like to try Bikram yoga, otherwise known as hot yoga. Then recently, we ran into a male friend of hers. A new business owner, he volunteered that he had just taken up Bikram yoga because of stress. According to him, he was either going to try yoga, take up smoking or have a nervous breakdown.

After he walked off, my sister stared into space and sighed, "Guys love Bikram yoga." They do, it seems, so I set out to try and find out why.

Bikram yoga was created by Bikram Choudhury, an Indian-born yogi who became an Olympic weight-lifting champion before being severely injured in a weight-lifting accident. With help from his guru, Bikram created a 26-posture series that

ultimately restored his physical health. In the early 1970s, Choudhury traveled to the U.S. where he became yogi to the stars.

Diana Kang is the owner of Bikram Yoga in Rockville. When I tell her my premise—that guys love Bikram yoga—she quickly nods in agreement.

Women are more fickle when shopping for a yoga class, says Kang. They usually try her Bikram class, disappear and then reappear months later. But men are attracted to the regular sequence of 26 postures. Classes move like clockwork through the various poses, which work every part of the body. Participants push themselves at their own pace, and the repetition allows them to see progress and choose when to push harder.

Kang says most men show up for their initial session because they have one of three complaints: a sore back, knee problems or too much weight. Bikram yoga is known as



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**Left:** Bikram students form Ustrasana, otherwise known as the camel pose. **Right:** Owner Diana Kang (front) is backed up by Bikram Yoga teachers Yasmin Tuazon and Katie Tulloss (second row) and Kerry Gilliland, Spencer Davis and Rana Karjawally (third row).

“healing yoga,” and there is strong scientific rationale for choosing yoga to improve one’s physical health. In fact, in a United Nations–sponsored research project at Tokyo University, Bikram Choudhury helped doctors prove that yoga regenerates tissue and cures chronic ailments.

Bikram yoga takes place in a heated room, allowing the heat to help a great deal in healing. The heated room warms the muscles, helps prevent injury, allows for a “deeper” workout and cleanses the body by flushing toxins.

I recently took Kang’s Bikram yoga class on a Monday morning. The Web site, [www.bikramyogarockville.com](http://www.bikramyogarockville.com), prepared me with the items I needed to bring: water, beach and face towels, and loose workout clothes. I rented the yoga mat for a nominal price.

Once the class got underway, I looked around and realized that a third of the 20 or so participants were men. It seemed pretty clear that—with a couple of exceptions—the women were more skilled or practiced than the men. But who really cares? Because as the class progressed through the 26 poses, we kept our eyes trained on ourselves in the mirror, using our reflections to self-correct our postures.

I confess: I’m in good shape. I play a lot of tennis and softball and spend as much time engaging in physical outdoor activity as I can. However, like most men, I lack flexibility and my core strength could definitely use improvement. So as we moved through the poses, I felt pushed to my limit—but it was my choice how hard to push. Then, there was the sweat.

I sweat profusely. But the man in front of me generated a 12-inch-wide pool of sweat at his feet.

Before, during and following the class, I was careful to drink liquids. Afterward, I felt like my posture had been magically realigned to what I had always wanted it to be. I felt amazing.

Kang says that after regular participation in Bikram yoga, most men report that their back and knee ailments are healed. It also helps prevent injuries. Moreover, Kang says that those who are close to male participants report emotional changes. “Spouses, relatives and friends say the men are nicer,” remarks Kang.

Seth Weiner, owner of Sonic Promos in Gaithersburg, has been practicing Bikram yoga at the Rockville studio for five years. Weiner began practicing to lose weight and to strengthen torn anterior cruciate ligaments in both knees, and he says that his knees have basically healed. “It was suggested to me that I consider Bikram yoga because I was leading an active lifestyle,” he explains. “But I was also looking for something that would be helpful for my mental focus.”

“I think Bikram is more attractive to men because it’s such a strenuous form of yoga,” concludes Weiner. “Guys like to feel that there’s some sort of payoff when they work out. Looking at yourself in the mirror dripping with sweat is the reward.”

Bikram Yoga Rockville offers new participants an introductory week for \$20. For further information, go online to [www.bikramyogarockville.com](http://www.bikramyogarockville.com). 