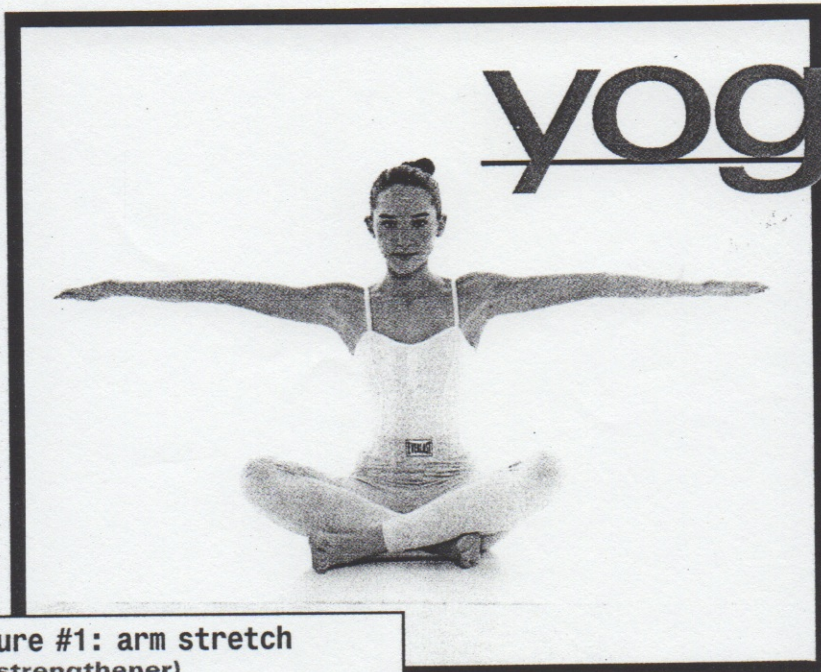


yoga, girl!



It's a workout that **tones your body** and **relaxes your mind**. **Susan Kaplow** is here to tell you how to just say "om."

Posture #1: arm stretch (and strengthener)

Sit cross-legged and hold your arms straight out to the sides, palms toward the ceiling. Try to hold this pose for three minutes, making sure your arms are superstraight. (You'll have a newfound respect for yogis afterward.)

One day three years ago, I looked in the mirror and did a massive reality check. All the running, StairMastering and biking that I'd been doing religiously had made my leg muscles thick, tight and—in my eyes—incredibly hulky. Perhaps you've heard the biological term *mesomorphic*, meaning, basically, people with short muscles. That's me. (*Ectomorphic* is Linda Evangelista. You get the picture.)

Since I was stuck with my DNA, I decided to check out yoga, which I'd heard could help me tone and strengthen my muscles without turning me into a linebacker. Also, the hippie-dippy weirdness that used to be associ-

lates the chest muscles and helps you breathe better.)

It took me a few minutes to deal (and shake the feeling that I was going to burst out laughing), and then I was able to stretch, breathe and hold several of the "postures" (yogaspeak for positions) with the rest of the class. By the end of the hour, yoga still seemed a little weird, but I could definitely understand why its popularity is growing: It makes your body feel good (most of the time). I'd never taken the time to *really stretch* before—that legs-out-straight/forefingers-looped-around-big-toes/face-pressed-to-knees kind of stretching. You even get to lie down once in a while to "just simply be." *Ahhh*. (Oops. I mean, *Om*.)

Don't assume, though, that yoga is the ideal slacker exercise for the hopelessly horizontal. You relax only *after* you've physically and mentally challenged yourself—often to the point of wishing cruel and unusual punishment on your teacher. (Just try holding your arms straight out to the sides like a T for three interminably long minutes.)

For those who are thinking, Yeah, yeah, but does it burn *calories*? The answer is yes—yoga is definitely a valid form of exercise—though experts admit that it isn't a cardiovascular workout and therefore ►



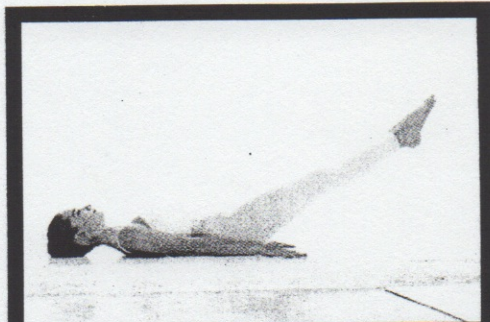
Posture #2: cobra

Tones stomach and eases lower-back tension

Lie on your stomach with your hands under your shoulders. Keeping your legs and hips on the floor, straighten your arms and arch your back to lift your upper body (like a quasi-push-up). Don't shrug your shoulders. Tilt your head back and breathe through your nose.

ated with yoga was supposedly as history as Jimi Hendrix.

But during the opening moments of my first yoga class, I was like, *Hello, I'm in a commune*. The teacher sat cross-legged facing the class and started the hour by chanting "Om" again and again. The class—also seated cross-legged with their eyes closed—chanted right back, and for a minute I thought everyone was going to either melt or take off on a magic-carpet ride. (I soon learned that chanting re-



Posture #3: navel strengthener
Need we say more?

Lie on your back with your arms at your sides, hands under your butt and heels together. Keeping your legs straight, raise them to a 45° angle and hold.

Posture #4: inverted camel pose
Good for toning back-of-leg and butt muscles
(and it helps ease period cramps)

Lie on your back with your knees bent. With your arms on the floor at your sides, grab your ankles. Keeping your shoulders, neck and head on the floor, slowly press your hips and back off the floor. Squeeze your thigh and butt muscles and hold.



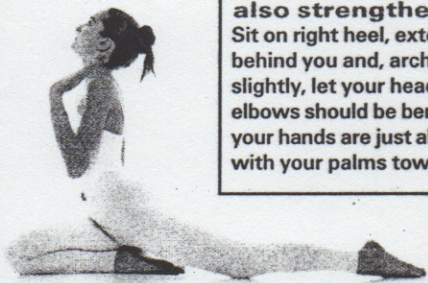
not as fierce a fat-burner as, say, a box-aerobics class.

Still, yoga is powerful enough to really change your muscle tone. I usually do yoga once a week, and I've noticed that it has really toned my muscles. Not that I've been transformed into an ectomorphic supermodel, but at least my muscles don't look so knotty anymore.

Posture #5: women's posture

A good all-over stretch that also strengthens arms

Sit on right heel, extend your left leg behind you and, arching your spine slightly, let your head fall back. Your elbows should be bent at your waist so your hands are just above your shoulders with your palms toward the ceiling.



Certain postures isolate and strengthen muscles (in the same way plain old leg lifts do), while others stretch them so they're more supple. Donna Davidge, a New York

City yoga trainer, says that some yoga postures even massage certain glands and organs and, in turn, speed up the body's metabolism. Another

major plus is that it costs hardly anything. State-of-the-art sneakers and a \$100 leotard-and-leggings set aren't required. And contrary to popular belief, neither is Gumby's flexibility.

All you need is you, a little floor space and 20 minutes or so to do this seven-posture yoga workout designed by Donna.

Try holding each posture for as long as you can, shooting for 30 seconds to start and working your way up. You should be in each posture for three minutes total (e.g., if you hold for 30 seconds, repeat it six times). If you keep your eyes closed and concentrate

on taking slow, deep breaths, you'll relax your mind along with your body. And be sure to lie on your back with your palms facing the ceiling for about a minute between each posture, or you'll miss out on that peaceful, easy feeling. Now that's my kind of workout. ■

Posture #6: locust

Another good butt and leg-muscle toner

Lie flat on your stomach with your heels together, chin on the floor and forearms supporting your hips (and your fists clenched beneath you). Squeeze your butt and lift your legs off the floor. Hold this posture and breathe through your nose.



Posture #7: stretch pose

The ultimate stomach strengthener

Lie on your back with legs straight, feet together and toes pointed. Simultaneously raise your head and your ankles a few inches off the floor. Stare at your toes. Take long, deep breaths through your nose. Aim to hold this pose for one minute.



om improvement

Yoga, which comes from the Sanskrit word for "union," originated in India and has been practiced for thousands of years.

(Compare that to the infantile StairMaster, which is a measly 13 years old.)

There are three distinct schools of yoga: *Ashtanga*, the most athletic and strengthening form; *hatha*, the most stretching and gymnastic; and *Kundalini*, which focuses a lot on breathing and is sort of a combination of the previous two. Sting and the Red Hot Chili Peppers' Flea both practice *Kundalini*; Courteney Cox and Woody Harrelson practice *Ashtanga*.

The latest trend in yoga is riding a stationary bike and taking a yoga class at the same time. (Crunch Fitness in New York City calls its class Cyked.) The teacher coaches breathing and relaxation and takes you on an "inner journey" while your feet are busy pushing the pedals. It's better than being stuck on a road to nowhere.

There are some cool yoga videos available that'll have you chanting and raving. Check out *Kathy Smith New Yoga Basics* and *Ali MacGraw Yoga Mind & Body*. —S.K.