



YOGA

for Guys Who Like Fries?

By Trish Stratus, Stratusphere Yoga Studio Proprietor

Yes, yoga for guys who like fries ... or like running or like to have reduced stress levels, or like to have improved sports performance. Seeing the increased number of male yoga students in her studio, Stratusphere, Trish Stratus tells us why she thinks 'real men do yoga' - and why.

When I first opened the doors of Stratusphere approximately 2 years ago, slowly but surely our classes started filling up. Initially as expected, most of our students were women, even our change rooms reflected the anticipated men to women ratio, offering the same amenities but at about 1/3 of the size. My first action plan to try to introduce the idea of doing yoga to men was to offer a special men's only class, just in case it was a matter of getting that awkward first time out of the way and getting comfortable doing the poses in a yoga class. So, we launched our 'Yoga for guys who like fries' class one Saturday afternoon.

Catchy name, a carefully chosen timeslot - after noon-ish, so sleeping in at the end of a work week or a Friday night out was considered - and we waited. The numbers in class fluctuated, people came and went, but ultimately it was a small dedicated group that kept that class alive for almost a year. At which point the instructor announced she

was going away and suggested that they choose a 'regular' class to go to until she got back. It was sort of like the mama bird letting her baby birds leave the nest, sending them out to try their new wings. Well, this group took flight just fine. More than half of that original group are regulars now; a few of them are even doing headstands in class. Peter who has kept up his practice almost religiously for the last 2 years progressed even quicker by adding an additional private yoga class once a week. "In the beginning I couldn't even touch my toes and I would skip or do modifications of some of the more challenging poses. Now I comfortably and confidently do every pose of a 90 minute class," says Peter, who after losing 22 lbs, has experienced the benefits not only physically but mentally too. "I never miss a week, not only is it a great workout for your entire body, it is a great stress reliever," he says.

These days in Peter's class on any given

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week you'll even find there are more men in class than women. Either there is something about that after noon-ish timeslot or they just like the way instructor Sandy McHugh continues to challenge them each week while constantly progressing their practice - nothing like a good butt kicking yoga class! But that is not the only class that is chock full of men - don't worry there are still plenty of women, but nowadays we see anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of the classes are comprised of men. It noticeably began to happen over this last year, where we continued to see the ratio narrow as the word got out about yoga. It suddenly seemed it was more acceptable, more men were inquiring about beginner's classes and more men came to the studio looking to buy their own mat - something we saw from women only when we first opened. A male yogi was a rare site at Stratusphere, besides our own instructors. The reasons were varied, they were joining their girlfriend, they were being sent over by their chiropractor to help treat back pain, or they were using yoga as a means to reduce the increased stress levels today's economy has caused. We even had a group of guys that starting taking classes to fulfill the yoga component of the popular DVD workout system P90X, a unique system of 12 high-intensity workouts, one of them a yoga workout, to be done over a period of 90 days. Richard who first suggested the idea and signed up the group found it beneficial to have the one on one instruction of a real teacher to get him through the yoga session. "Not to mention that it's a great way to meet women," he adds.

Another trend we began to see was men using yoga as a complement to their current fitness routines; many are using it to improve their muscle conditioning and are experiencing improved sports performance. We see everyone from weekend warriors, to

house leaguers, golfers and runners - it's almost like yoga is the new cross-training for men. More and more you hear about pro athletes that are integrating yoga into their training regimes. Author John Capouya lists 21 male star athletes that enthusiastically use yoga in their training routine in his book titled *Real Men Do Yoga*, which include NFL-ers Eddie George and Shannon Sharpe, MLB pitcher Barry Zito, NBA superstar Kevin Garnett and PGA golfers Ty Tryon and David Duval. "I've gotten e-mails from men all over the country telling me how much they enjoyed getting started with yoga, how it's improved their flexibility and sports performance and added a whole new dimension to their exercise lives. I really believe the project's success shows that a critical mass of American men is clearly - finally - ready to give it a try and to profit from all of yoga's proven mental, physical and psychological benefits," he says.



Pictured here are Toronto Argonauts offensive guard Taylor Robertson, defensive tackle Adriano Belli, linebacker Kevin Eiben and running back Jeff Johnson

Highly publicized appearances of members of both the Toronto Argonauts and the Toronto Maple Leafs at Stratusphere probably didn't hurt either. And what was interesting was to see that yoga was being introduced from the organization as part of the teams' official training program. When the Leafs made their first visit to Stratusphere in

2008, most of them were no stranger to downward dog. Matt Nichols, the former Head Strength and Conditioning Coach with the Toronto Maple Leafs at the time had the team doing hot yoga 1-2 times a week, saying that "Flexibility work should comprise at least 25% of the training time."

Whatever the reason is, if you are a male considering taking up yoga, the first step is to check the ego at the door and even if it seems difficult in the beginning - don't give up! Stick it out and be a part of the growing number of men who are seeing both the physical and mental benefits that no other work out can offer.

To further illustrate how 'real men do



Michael Parkyn

Q: Why did you start doing yoga?

A: I had a herniated disk and I heard that yoga can help. I also was looking to improve flexibility.

Q: How long have you practiced yoga?

A: 5 months.

Q: How often do you do yoga?

A: 2-4 times a week.

Q: What benefits have you gained from doing yoga?

A: Most notable is my back pain has decreased and my cardiovascular ability has improved. I am now able to do things that I wasn't able to do before due to my back pain - such as cycling and sitting for longer periods of time.

yoga', as author John Capouya suggests, below are 3 real and actual students of Stratusphere.

Get your butt kicked in Sandy's shape ashtanga class every Saturday at 12:30pm, or visit www.stratusphereyoga.com to see our full schedule. If you're a beginner, look for our 'Into Yoga' workshops taught by Dave Bruni to help build a solid foundation and get you ready to tackle any class on our schedule.

Stratusphere is located in the Village at Vaughan Mills
255 Bass Pro Mills Drive, Vaughan, ON L4K 0A2 • 905-760-YOGA



David Hillesheim

Q: Why did you start doing yoga?

A: A friend suggested it and it looked like fun.

Q: How long have you practiced yoga?

A: 5 years.

Q: How often do you do yoga?

A: 2-7 times a week.

Q: What benefits have you gained from doing yoga?

A: It has changed many things for the better: old injuries have healed, my core strength has improved dramatically, stress is greatly reduced, and internal organ function is noticeably better. Clearly, it is the best type of exercise anyone can do.

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Dave Alonzi

Q: Why did you start doing yoga?

A: I always was interested in trying yoga but never had anyone to go with. I started dating someone who practiced yoga so I finally had my chance to try it - I was hooked right away.

Q: How long have you practiced yoga?

A: 7 months.

Q: How often do you do yoga?

A: 3-4 times a week.

Q: What benefits have you gained from doing yoga?

A: Yoga has been very beneficial to my life. I used to have frequent anxiety attacks but now I use yoga to help control them. I used to use the gym as my only source of stress-relief but it was never a cure it only helped. Yoga was the cure I was looking for...the environment, the practice and the very positive attitude of the teachers and students make it my escape from all life's ups and downs. When I'm in a class, nothing else matters - just the practice.

After a hot yoga class I feel like a new person, it's like I sweat out anything bad. It makes me feel lighter physically and mentally.

In addition, yoga has helped me break through my plateaus at the gym. I have been working out for 11 years and in the last couple of years no matter how much I was dieting or changing my workouts I wasn't seeing any positive changes until I started yoga.

Yoga has also aided with my joint pain from weightlifting. It has also made me more vascular, flexible, and balanced.

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