

train >

WEAPON 1:

**BIKRAM
YOGA**

THE
SWEAT
SMELL OF
SUCCESS

Photo: Simon Le



26 postures. 90 minutes. 40°C. 40% humidity. If you think yoga is just for middle-aged mothers to do a bit of light stretching before their coffee date – think again. Bikram yoga is a serious workout. A 70-kilo person can burn up to 1000 calories in just one session!

This form of yoga is perhaps best known for its famous (or infamous) founder Bikram Choudhury and his outrageous quotes: “I have balls like atom bombs” and “What happens when they [yoga students] say they will commit suicide unless you sleep with them? What am I supposed to do? Sometimes having an affair is the only way to save someone’s life.”

And yet it’s one of the fastest-growing forms of yoga in Australia, with followers saying it’s the best full-body workout around, helps injuries, improves postures, relieves back pain, increases energy, detoxes and cleanses, increases flexibility and strength... to name just a few. Ultra FITNESS chatted to Martin Standring of Bikram Yoga Northern Beaches and sent our publisher on a 30-day yoga challenge to find out what this strength, flexibility, balance and cardio workout has to offer.

Hi Martin, tell us how you discovered Bikram yoga. Well, I didn't do my first yoga class until I was 43. I was always active but by the time I was in my 30s I had three complete ruptures of my ACL and arthritis in one of my knees. My knees constantly ached and the pain was so bad that I couldn't continue my job as a firefighter and had to stop doing all the things I loved.

When I was introduced to Bikram yoga I absolutely hated it. It was the hardest thing I'd ever done. But that's what got me going back and within 4-6 weeks I noticed an unbelievable change in my knees. They didn't ache, they didn't throb, the pain just went. And from there I had less pain in my back, my hips, I started noticing I had more energy, I was sleeping better, it all sort of snowballed.

I hear the training to become a Bikram teacher is quite intense?

Yes! If I thought my first yoga class was the hardest thing I'd ever done, then the training to become a Bikram teacher was a whole new level. Everyday for nine weeks you do two 90-minute classes of Bikram yoga, four hours of posture clinics, 2-3 hours of lectures every evening, anatomy exams and then you have to learn the dialogue.

You are absolutely sleep deprived because they keep you up till 2 or 3 a.m. every morning. They push all of your buttons to force you to learn how to deal with stress. After 9 weeks you learn to not let anything steal your peace.

Why do you think people are drawn to Bikram yoga?

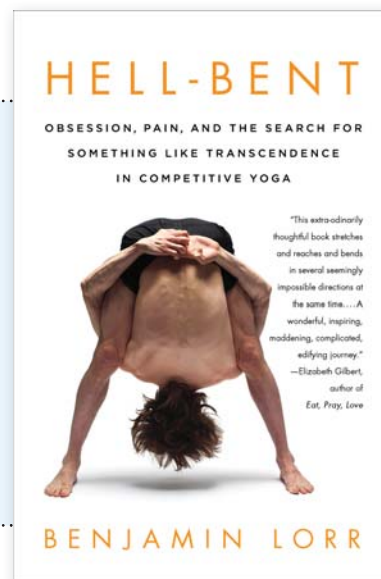
The people that start doing the yoga go back to their families, their work, their friends and people give you that look, *You look different, have you changed your hair? Had something done?* And the answer is no, I've just been doing yoga.

People also love that there isn't a single part of your body that isn't worked in Bikram yoga. Bikram says you work everything from 'bones to skin, fingertips to toes, inside out'.

We Love

Hell-Bent by Benjamin Lorr

Keen to know more? This hard-to-put-down read goes inside the fascinating, and often extreme, world of Bikram yoga as Benjamin Lorr takes us on his journey of personal transformation, examines the science behind the yoga and offers a look at the man Bikram Choudhury.



Why the heat?

Bikram yoga is practiced in a 40°C room with 40% humidity. The heat and humidity is to replicate the conditions of India where the yoga came from.

It's so important because it relaxes your muscles which enables you to safely go much deeper into postures than you could ever normally do in a cold room. Also, with the heat comes the sweat and the sweat is your bodies way of eliminating your toxins through the skin. You cleanse yourself from the inside out.

Why is it good for injuries?

The compression postures are what makes Bikram yoga so good for injuries. It's all about getting fresh, oxygenated blood to the injured parts of the body and improving the circulation to those parts of the body, regenerating the cells that have become scar tissue. The harder it is the more your body needs it.

We've had people who have been in pain for so many years and then they have tried Bikram yoga and they are pain-free. We've had people crying, saying I can't believe it, I've been to chiropractors, physiotherapists and doctors for 15 years and now just 3 months of the yoga has cured me.

Bikram yoga is often criticized for being a 'Westernised' yoga and not having enough meditation – what's your take?

Bikram yoga is actually a 90-minute meditation. Meditation isn't sitting down

crossed legged saying om. As long as you are focusing and thinking about what you are doing, that is your meditation.

Everything in the room is telling you to do something else, to try to distract you, it's so hot and so humid, the postures are hard, your heartbeat is going crazy. All you want to do is move, grab your water bottle, wipe the sweat, scratch your head, put your hands on your hips, look down on the floor, breathe in by the mouth. Our meditation is to be absolutely still and lock your eyes on your own eyes in the mirror and not move.

Is Bikram yoga good for weight loss?

You can't help but lose weight. It balances your metabolism through the thyroid compressions. If you need to lose weight, you will, if you don't, you won't.

Some say that Bikram yoga is too hard on the body and causes injury?

Bikram yoga is all about pushing yourself beyond what is comfortable. If you do exactly what the teacher says you cannot injure yourself – but you have to push yourself. When you are doing yoga, your body is realigning so you are going to get pain.

Does Bikram yoga help with other fitness pursuits?

Whatever you're into, whether it's surfing, rock climbing, running or weight lifting,

Bikram yoga will complement this. It keeps you flexible and heals and prevents injuries. Bikram says, do whatever you like but do your Bikram yoga.

Because it's so intense, should only the very fit try Bikram?

Not at all! Bikram yoga is for absolutely everybody. We have everyone from 15-year-olds to people in their 70s. As Bikram says, 'never too old, never too late, never too sick to start from scratch'. No matter how many problems or injuries you've had, this yoga is available to everyone. It doesn't matter if you've never done exercise or yoga before – you can come along.

“BIKRAM YOGA IS ALL ABOUT PUSHING YOURSELF BEYOND WHAT IS COMFORTABLE. YOUR BODY IS REALIGNING SO YOU ARE GOING TO GET PAIN.”

THE DRINK OF YOGIS

Coconut water is popular among Bikram yogis who chug it down after class to replenish the fluids and electrolytes lost with all that sweating. Ultra FITNESS chatted to Scott Mendelsohn from Chi Coconut Water to find out why coconut water is the latest superfood.

Why is coconut water so good to drink after a workout?

Coconut water is full of electrolytes, calcium, potassium and magnesium – everything that is good for you for only 25 calories per serve.

Why is Chi Coconut Water different from others on the market?

Chi Coconut Water has the lowest natural sugar of all the packaged coconut waters on the market with only 1.2 grams naturally occurring sugar compared to over 4 grams for most others. Chi is also the only brand with a resealable cap so you don't need to drink it all at once when opened.

What's your favourite coconut water smoothie?

Blend 1 small banana, ½ cup baby spinach, 1 cup Chi coconut water and 1 tsp hempseed oil – enjoy!

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- renews energy levels with more than twice the potassium of the average banana and more than most sports drinks.
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- hydrates quicker than water, packed with electrolytes. Like a sports drink without the nauffies.
- research suggests that cytokines within coco water showed significant anti-ageing, anti-carcinogenic and anti-inflammatory effects.

45 HOURS IN 30 DAYS

Can Ultra FITNESS publisher Michael survive the Bikram challenge?

It all started in the doctor's surgery. After a lifting injury, I was told to my dismay "No more lifting! Your left shoulder is ruined and will require an operation." It was October and my summer was not looking good.

The next day my wife invited me to my first Bikram class and, as weird as it was, I was hooked! Halfway through the class while I was lying flat on my back in the *savasana* posture the instructor mentioned a 30-day challenge in November. Suddenly I was on a path that I felt would realign me both physically and mentally. What I did not expect was the emotional challenge I had just signed up for!

Day 1: I go to the very first class of the challenge at 6am – the room is packed with 30 people all excited and energised for what's to come. Here we go!

Day 2: The first thing you learn about yoga is that you only ever 'practise' it. You never actually master it – sure you get better and stronger – but the aim is to continue improving...forever.

Day 3: People's reactions to me doing Bikram yoga are interesting...here's just a few of the comments I've received: "Yuck, all that sweat in one place", "Yoga is never going to get you the results you need" and "How can you stand the heat for 90 minutes, that cannot be healthy??"

Day 4: Boy, it's hard to get to today's 6am class, but I leave the room feeling charged for a great day. Starting to feel improvement in my balance and I'm getting better sleep than I have in ages!

Day 6: I'm exhausted, do I really have to go again? I tell myself I'll miss a day and it won't be too hard to make it up tomorrow.

Day 7: Two classes in one day! First class at 10am: no problem. Second class at 7pm: that is nuts. I feel like I've run a marathon (or at the very least two half marathons in one day!).

Day 8: I'm still in recovery from yesterday but have to go today (no way am I doing two classes again tomorrow). I'm sleeping really well and even if I drink 3L+ of water a day I don't wake up at 3am needing to pee. This is new for me!

Day 9: This is hard. My yoga is stagnating and I am tired. In the *savasana* posture I surprise myself by getting teary for no reason! I am focused on myself and emotions are flowing.

Day 10: 45 people in the room today! I just want out. My buddy needs to pee and the instructor will not let him leave the room – what is going on here!?

Day 12: Ouch. I have to do two classes as I'm flying to Queensland for a photo shoot tomorrow. To make matters worse I got a spray tan tonight on my badly dehydrated body and nearly collapsed! I think my skin must have drunk the spray tan chemicals in or the tan stopped my rehydration process. Spending the night in bed dehydrated.

Day 13: Missed today's class and really enjoyed it!

Day 14: Oops missed another class today.

Day 15: I'll catch up on my extra classes later...the kite-surfing conditions are too good!

Day 17: Two classes for the second day in a row, what a mistake to make! Am so tired but once I get to the studio I am inspired and it's good to get back into it.

Day 19: My 6am class was hard but good. The 15 minutes straight after class always feel incredible. I realise my skins feels brand new and I am breathing so slowly! Feeling this calm is a new experience.

Day 20: Ten days to go! I feel like my posture is better than it has been for ages... but not much progress in terms of getting better at the yoga postures. In fact, I am

terrible at several postures.

Day 22: The women here are amazing, I start to notice the beauty in their grace and power. They do not look like gym girls but like dancers! Oops, I think my wife spotted me looking, I'm sure she understands it is for research purposes only...

Day 23: I have lost 4 kilos! I have nice little abs starting to show, who would have thought? 90 minutes spent looking in the mirror each day and I can see and feel change. 89kg is now 85kg, I eat better, I drink water like crazy and I move better. Best of all, all I have to do is turn up and the leader gets me through the rest. There is a strong feeling of contentment in the room. We are in this together and the group looks great.

Day 25: OMG I like the look of my body! Bought some yoga shorts, dude I am the real thing. Seems that most of the claims these yoga teachers made have some truth. What I like is that the benefits are also internal. I am not just looking good, I am detoxing, reducing stress and cleansing my body.

Day 26: I was so tired when I got up at 5:30am this morning that I drove to the yoga studio, turned around and went to the office to do accounts. A weird choice, but I needed the break!

Day 27: Just did my best class ever! Very focused, no eye wandering, just me with me for 90 sweaty minutes.

Day 29: Early class and then a morning swim at the beach followed by fruit salad for breakfast. Amazing!

Day 30: Away in New Zealand so I can't finish with the group, but the Christmas party is a week away!

MICHAEL AFTER

The truth is I want to do this again. Next time I would choose a quieter month being so busy at work made it very hard. But my results are undeniable: 4 kilos fat loss, better sleep, straighter posture, my sore shoulder is still sore but stronger, I feel very strong and super healthy, made some

new friends and I've seen several people transform themselves.

One lady at my studio has done 100 classes in 100 days to finish on her 50th birthday. She looks amazing and when I talked to her the other day it seemed like she has completely transformed her life

throughout the process. The best part is how the yoga has helped her rebuild her self-esteem; I can see a great sense of pride in her as she stands tall. She has gained huge inner strength and power over her situation. Brilliant. **UFM**

Photo: Simon Le



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Go to www.bikramyoga.com and click 'Class Finder' to find a Bikram studio in your neighbourhood.

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The Oui Secret Fitness Package - superior online training with that all-important personal touch

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Video demonstrations, plus personal phone calls and messages ensure motivation and support to guide you every step of the way



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