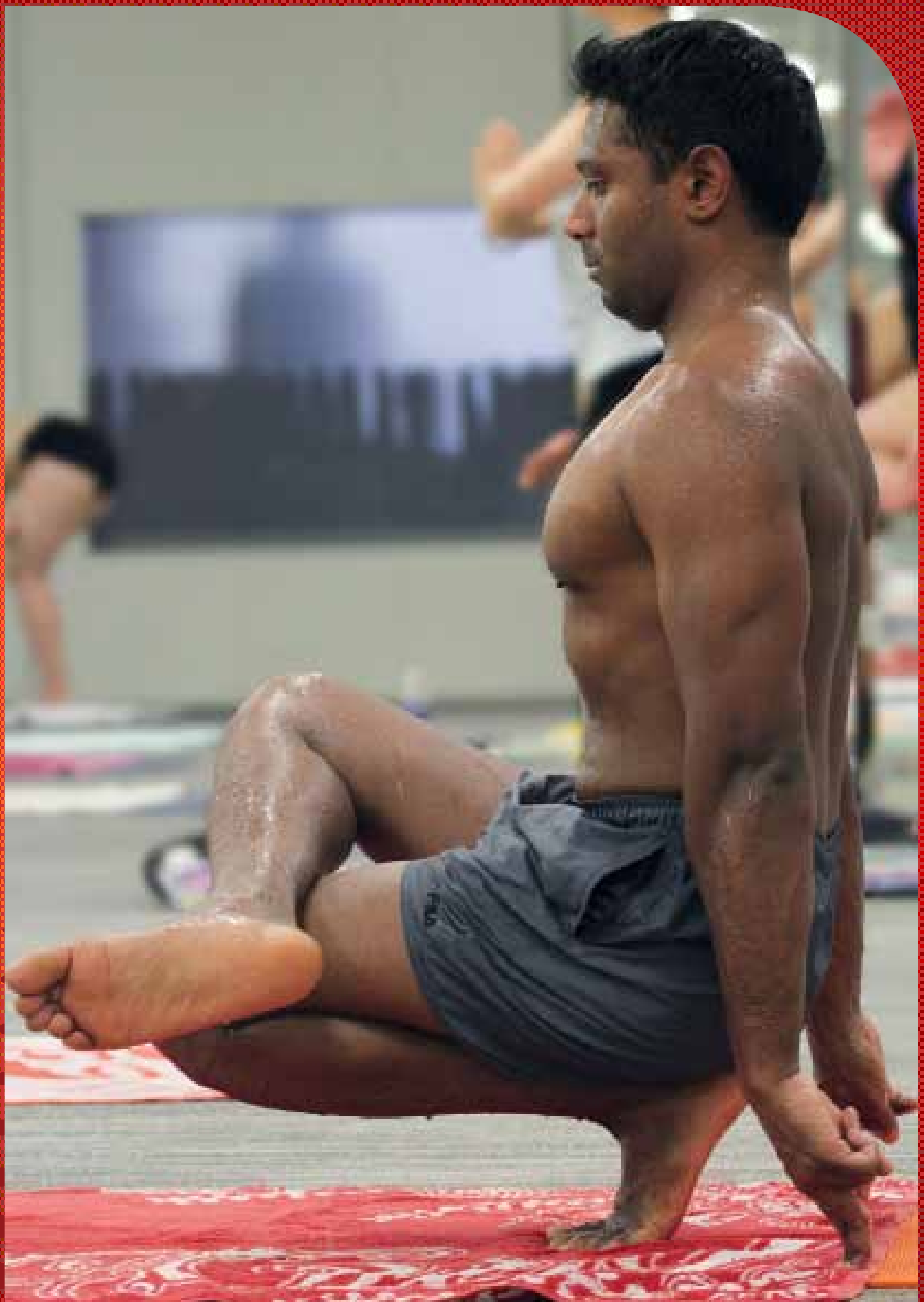


the original hot yoga

One yoga studio in Sydney's Five Dock is living proof of the many life-changing benefits of Bikram

If you ever meet a Bikram devotee you won't have to press them hard for details. Bikram fans around the globe rave about the almost addictive effect of the practice – once you start, you just can't stop.

Part of Bikram's appeal lies – intriguingly – in its difficulty. Bikram classes run for 90 minutes in a room heated to 40°C with 40 per cent humidity and cover a set series of the same 26 postures and two breathing exercises. The challenge of making your way through tough poses in hot, humid conditions can either leave you cold (so to speak), or leave you feeling awesome – pumped full of endorphins and an all-encompassing sense of achievement.



style profile

While it may sound daunting, Bikram can be done by beginners and advanced alike. Each pose can be adapted to the individual's abilities, while the heat helps enable a deep stretch without risk of injury.

"You're never too old or unwell to start Bikram," says Brad Goodchild, the owner and head teacher of Bikram Yoga Five Dock, who has people aged from 13 to 68 visit the studio. "People can take each class at their own pace and ability level."

Brad's students rave about the benefits Bikram has brought them, and the teacher says that it feels like he's paying it forward.

"I was given those benefits with my body and life, now I'm in a position where I can help others achieve the same thing," he says. "I had a man in his 50s come up to me the other day and tell me he'd just touched his toes. He hadn't done that since he was 16 and he'd only been with us for three weeks!"

Brad admits that everyone comes to yoga for a different reason.

"Often people will come in with sore back, hip or knee and they want to get better movement. Some people come in expecting something different with a pre-conceived notion that yoga is easy and relaxing and they actually find a very different experience.

"The thing I love about yoga is that we all have such different backgrounds, but we all leave that at the door. We're all the same on our mat – it doesn't matter our age, how much money we have, how many children we have, what we do, what our material possessions are. We just get down to our real self when we come into the room. It's just you, your yoga mat, a towel and some water. We're all equal in the room, we're all here to help ourselves and help each other."

CASE STUDIES

Four Bikram Yoga Five Dock students share their amazing transformations



beating anxiety

Rosemary Latorto, 44, is a financial controller who came from a running background.

"But I like a challenge so I thought I'd try something new," she says. "And I've never looked back!"

Rosemary had previously suffered from anxiety, and had sought the help of a psychologist before starting Bikram yoga.

"I know now, with yoga, I can get in my yoga mood and relax myself," she says. "It helps me focus.

"It's different to running - I used to run between 60 and 100km a week and do half marathons and things. But I got injured and would put on weight and then have to lose it... This is a lot more balanced."

Rosemary also admits to having a poor body image in the past - something that yoga has helped to alleviate: "I've learned to accept who I am - this is my shape, this

is my body, this is who I am."

It's the psychological benefits that have surprised Rosemary most about Bikram.

"I've never been involved in a lot of spiritual things and I didn't know what to expect but I'm finding this is improving my wellbeing as well as my physical strength," she says. "The heat opens you up - to your emotions and who you are."

A busy schedule of 40 hours a week as financial controller of a family business means there's a lot of pressure and "intense family stuff going on" for Rosemary.

"You just put yourself under so much pressure," she admits. "But now I think - this is how it is and what it is. I'm learning to deal with stressful situations much more calmly and with more focus. I'm looking forward to where it's going to take me."



beating the odds

Ralph Greco, 51, developed the rare neurological movement disorder call dystonia when he was 43.

"I was working as a house painter back then when the muscles in my neck began to move uncontrollably and twist my neck to the left, and they would spasm," says Ralph, adding it took several months for the one-in-10,000 disorder to eventually be diagnosed.

"I became a recluse," he says. "For many years I wouldn't go out anywhere because I lost all of my self-confidence.

"Then my cousin told me I should try Bikram yoga because it was performed in a heated environment that may help my neck muscles relax more."

Ralph began three to four classes a week at Bikram Yoga Five Dock and within three weeks noticed his neck muscles had begun to spasm much less and his symptoms were improving.

"By the time I went for my three-monthly Botox treatment in my neck, my neurologist asked me what had been going on because he said my sudden improvement was 'incredible'. He told me 'you're a lot better than you used to be'," says Ralph.

"I went from going through hell and living like a hermit to regaining my self-confidence and living my life again thanks to Bikram yoga. After seven years I actually went to a wedding recently and all my friends were so happy for me.

Six months later and Ralph's neurologist has even decreased the amount of Botox he needs.

"I'm going out again," he says happily. "I'm looking at getting back into my work and I've even started to talk to women again!

"It hasn't cured me, of course, but Bikram has been a godsend for me in all areas of my life and I'm the fittest now I think I've ever been."

starting over

Adla Amine, 51, is a mother of four and a charity worker. Her son's girlfriend introduced her to Bikram yoga.

"To be honest, I was worried about how I was going to cope with the heat!" she says. "It was really hot in there, and the first class I went to I could hardly do any of the moves."

Shortly afterwards, another son's wife came over from Thailand with yoga experience, and encouraged Adla to keep on going. She began to focus on eating a healthy diet and undertook the studio's 30-day challenge - 30 classes in 30 days.

"I had been attending three classes a week, but I was ready to push myself harder."

As well as the 30-day challenge, Adla began a cleansing diet.

"I could feel a change," she says. "I was more energetic, calmer and happier."

"A visit to the doctor confirmed that I had lost six kilograms. My blood pressure and cholesterol levels went down, and my medications for these were reduced. I also no longer needed to take arthritis medicine."

Adla has now lost more than eight kilos and hates missing a single day of yoga.

"I can do all the moves confidently," she says. "Bikram yoga has not only helped me physically, it's helped me mentally and emotionally, too."



no more pain

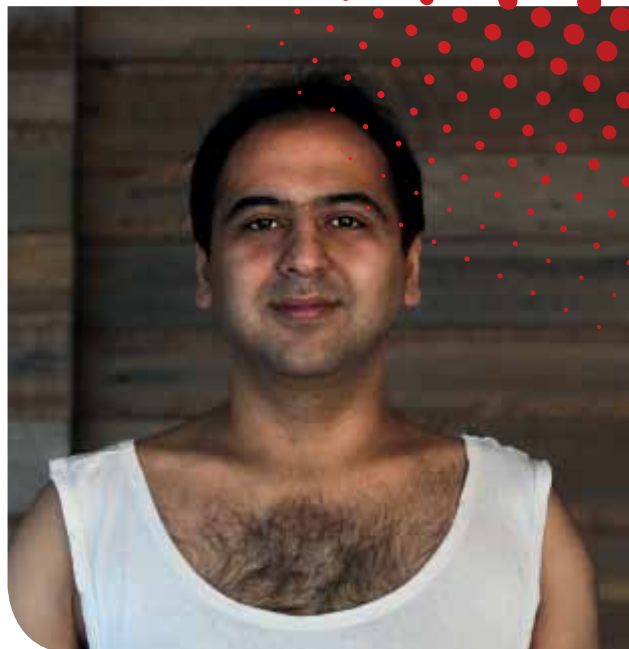
Sumeet Rupani, 32, is a small business owner who loves to play tennis and jog. However, a knee problem meant that Sumeet had to start wearing a support on his left knee whenever he exercised, because of the pain. He also found that the pain in his knee was affecting his work.

"I've got a business and I stand on the floor a lot," he says. Soon Sumeet found he could only stand for a few hours at a time. But then he was introduced to Bikram by a friend.

"I've been doing Bikram for about four months now," he says. "My knee muscles and lower calves are getting stronger, and I no longer need to wear a knee support when I play sports and run and things of that sort. There's no more pain there on the knee anymore."

Sumeet admits that there was also a huge amount of pressure on his knees from his weight, but since starting Bikram he has lost five kilograms and says he has "much more energy".

"My diet is good food," he says. "I don't stop myself and haven't changed my diet - the only difference has been Bikram yoga."



Find out more about Bikram Yoga Five Dock at bikramyogafivedock.com.au. For more info about Bikram in general, head to bikramyoga.com