

Yoga twists and turns to reach a new audience

Stretching for dog lovers, cyclists and smokers

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Although there won't be ashtrays in the ashram, Canadians will soon see yoga reinvented for a crowd more likely to find nirvana in Marlboros than mantras.

The ancient health practice is winning new converts with classes that customize yoga for the narrowest of niches, including Broadway fans, stockbrokers, punk rockers, comedy enthusiasts, hula dancers, cyclists and dog owners.

Starting this summer, there will even be a yoga program designed exclusively to help smokers kick the habit.

"Learning proper breathing techniques, people find, is an important part of quitting smoking -- like part of the 12 steps," says Sari Nisker, a Toronto-based yogi. "Yoga is very helpful because it's (used) to heal the body, heal the mind."

The workshop, still in development, will likely fuse restorative yoga classes with sessions with an addictions counsellor, nutritionist, general practitioner and yoga therapist. It's expected to launch in late summer at Spynya, which opens in April, an Ontario studio that gets its name from a cross-pollination between spinning on a stationary bike and yoga instruction.

Similarly creative yoga classes are proving popular across North America.

Vancouver's Studeo55 caters to the city's power brokers with yoga that starts when the stock market closes. The Union in Toronto's Cabbagetown brings anarchy to the ashram with punk rock yoga, which integrates non-traditional music and free-form movement. Regina's The Yoga Den entices baby boomers with classes tweaked especially for the over-50 physique.

And, at the trendy U.S. chain Crunch, there are about 50 varieties from which to choose, including Laughing Lotus Yoga, for the comedy fan; Ruff Yoga, for the dog owner which is performed in tandem with one's pup; Yogahola, for the hula enthusiast; and Wicked Yoga, where cast members from the eponymous Broadway musical strike poses alongside participants.

"The label almost always matters, and for a mature product like yoga, that label is rich with meanings and implications," explains Harry Beckwith, a branding consultant and author of the new book *You, Inc.* "The objective is to reach those who have rejected yoga by positioning it somewhat differently."

Thus, it becomes a kind of Frankenyoga, still utilizing the same body of knowledge,



CREDIT: Peter Redman, CanWest News Service

It's Frankenyoga to some, but Sari Nisker has found a way to mix yoga with spinning on a stationary bike.

but with one or more other health practices appended.

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