



A MAD MONTH

HOT YOGA

CAN 30 DAYS OF HOT YOGA
HELP HEAL A RUNNER?
DAWN TUFFERY DECIDED
TO FIND OUT.

Bikram is a bit like the ultramarathon version of yoga. You may sweat profusely, feel nauseous and frequently want to quit, while accessing just enough euphoric joy to get hooked. The studio I attend announced a 30-day challenge, where you commit to 30 classes in 30 days. Being injured, I thought, why not? There's currently a space in my life for some experimental masochism.

Bikram yoga is a series of 26 postures, mainly done twice, always in the same sequence and led by a teacher through a set dialogue that has its quirky moments (solid concrete one piece lamppost unbroken no knee).

Most famously, it's hot - about 40 degrees - and lasts for 90 minutes. Might regular practice help my stiff running body?

For Alisha Chakrabarti, a teacher at

Hamilton's Hot Yoga House, finding Bikram yoga proved invaluable. "I was out with ankle ligament and knee injuries at the age of 24 from competitive running," she says. "I was in terrible pain and even walking hurt. I knew I needed to stop running altogether and that is when I found Bikram yoga."


"After three months of yoga in the heat I could run pain-free and downhill too."

She believes that the improvement was a result of learning to decompress her knee joint and balance out the IT band and inner thighs to keep her hips and knees aligned.

"The only negative is that it is addictive and now I cannot live without a Bikram session after my run."

The heat element in Bikram can help lengthen tissues and fix knees for runners, says Chakrabarti. "It lays specific stress on the quadriceps and hamstrings and the balance between the two," she says. "It works on the Achilles tendon and technique of flexing the foot, basically working through all the antagonistic muscles to running muscles."

This sounded promising. Roll on the 30 days.



Here is my **30-Day Yoga Diary**

Day 1

Took a day off work to celebrate the first day of the yoga challenge. There's a bit of a carnival atmosphere. And star charts.

Day 2

Blah. 5.30am? This challenge was a bad BAD idea.

Day 3

This is okay. I hit both toe stands for the first time in ages. Start to get optimistic about speedy rate of improvement.

Day 4

Feeling stiff from yesterday. No toe stands. Feel pessimistic about slow rate of improvement.

Day 5

Tired. Hot. Amuse myself by counting the number of rolls my tummy makes when I sit down and put my forehead on one knee.

Day 6

Muse on the fact that I find it really comforting to surrender to someone else's orders for 90 minutes and not think, even when it potentially inflicts suffering to myself.

Should I be more worried about this personality trait? Should I be worried that I'm worrying rather than meditating?

Day 7

Woke up furious at the early alarm, and stayed full of rage for almost an hour of class until the anger seeped out my pores. Stupid yoga. One week down.

Day 8

Class was cruisy today. It almost felt cold by the end - bodies are good at this adaptation business. I am getting worse at some postures, possibly because of cumulative stiffness and no real recovery.

Day 9

Maximum zen for today's early wake-up, no rage at all. My camel pose elicits

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a compliment from the teacher. I feel a bit smug that now, with fixed firm, there are about two poses out of 26 that I can basically manage. Well, three, if you include lying down flat (savasana).

Day 10

Other teacher mentions that those who find fixed firm and camel pose easy tend to have a weak core. She's on to me.

Day 11

Class is okay. Hot. End up falling asleep in the afternoon, completely wiped out.

Day 12

A good one. I have the sense of 'practising' the postures, enjoying the experience rather than focusing on surviving an ordeal.

Day 13

One thing I'm noticing is the consistent sense of being silly-happy after class, a bit high. My level of tree-adoration in particular is sky-high. The shapes. The colours. The bigness.

Day 14

Our jovial Scottish guest teacher is good fun. Class is very full, but it feels like a party...the sort with lots and lots of sweat.

Day 15

Halfway there. Progress is notable by its absence. I console myself that I might just be doing the postures more correctly? Let's go with that.

Day 16

To add a scientific component to the experiment, I weigh myself before and after class, and drink nothing. 1.4 kg of water weight down. No wonder the towel is so sodden. It seems too high, so I'll try again.

Day 17

Pause-day for minor surgery on an ear keloid. Proceed to faint briefly during the op, but am pleased with the use of savasana breathing to stay calm. Yoga is useful.

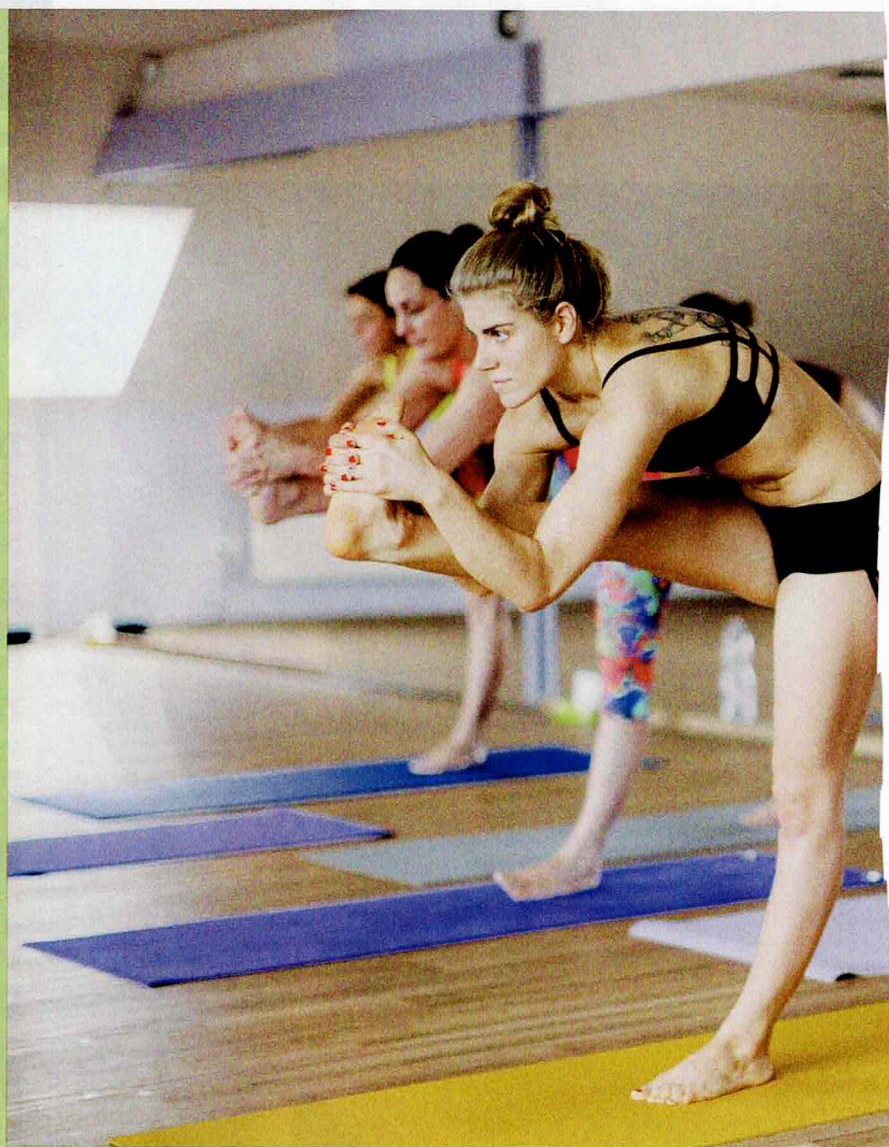
Despite my optimism, the wound is bleeding way too much to go to class so I'll have to make it up later.

Day 18

Luckily for me, this class is a relaxed pace Q & A. Some good insights on postures.

Day 19

Double class day - the usual Bikram, followed by Yin. Ear dressing is tender (and will be for the rest of the month), but



I'm finding a great use for all the running buffs I've accumulated.

Day 20

Hot, difficult (still). I try the weighing test again - 1.6kg this time, so 1.6 litres. No wonder I'm guzzling liquids for hours after, and craving electrolytes. At some points I've found myself eating electrolyte powder off a spoon.

Day 21

I'm getting the hang of these early ones, but am still feeling stiff. Have carpet blisters on my heels from all the sit-ups, but plasters just sweat straight off. Also I'm always showering or doing washing. #FirstworldBikramproblems.

Day 22

Osteo confirms he would have expected more flexibility given all these hours of bending. Good

class though, finally managing the odd toe stand. But there is something weird about leaving in the dark and biking home knowing I'll be heading back to that same room before it EVEN GETS LIGHT AGAIN.

Day 23

Oh hi moon. I'm sure I saw you just a few hours ago. Have to admit that I enjoyed the class though. Look at all the pretty trees.

Day 24

Family demands mean I have to skip a day, but I am also a bit too eager to accept this. I go for a run. Realise I still like running a lot more than yoga.

Day 25

Morning classes and the ensuing chill buzz are becoming my favourite. If I then stop for



This Runner Did 30 Days of Hot Yoga And You'll Never Guess What Happened?

At the conclusion of the 30 days I have a full star chart and receive a small trophy. It feels satisfying, an achievement of time management as much as anything else - finding two hours a day to drip profusely while gazing at myself in a mirror isn't easy, let alone the postures. I like the community and how I feel after class.

Am I transformed though? It's complicated. In a physical sense, not overtly, which is a little anticlimactic. I thought I'd improve flexibility more, and the injury is still niggly. What I have gained is a solid base and better understanding of the postures. Yoga proficiency is a long game. I do feel stronger in the core, quads, and glutes, which has got to be useful. It's also been excellent for offsetting a work-day of computer use in the wrists and arms - no RSI.

Most progress of all was in the head - a calmness, an appreciation of my body as it is each day, and relinquishing some of the need to control or measure results. For me, one or two classes of Bikram per week and perhaps a Yin class might be the sweet spot, interspersed with running.

High school runner Kimbi Sanders found this self-focus process both a challenge and a highlight over the 30 days. 'Seeing myself in the mirror every day was really confronting - knowing that, regardless of how good or bad the practice was, I was still the same person,' she says. 'You can't get away. The other benefit was knowing that I had an hour and a half to myself and be selfish, basically - I didn't have to talk to anyone.'

Sanders did have moments around day 25 where she felt overwhelmed, but has no hesitation in recommending the practice overall. 'Honestly, it's just - medicine,' she says. 'It's meditation. It's postures that are going to regulate your hormones and stretch muscles and heat you up. It was my guaranteed stretching time as a runner too, with all the trainings I was doing.'

For the first few days after the challenge ends, I revel in the freedom and sleep-ins. And then...sign up for a monthly pass. Maybe it is addictive after all.

vegetables and juice them, all before 8am, the smug levels stay high for hours.

Day 26

Double whammy day again, but Yin is a relaxing make-up class. I'm finally getting the hang of triangle.

Day 27

Slept funny and it hurts. The sequence works it out well though. This class is a good diagnostic for the muscles.

Day 28

Early start feels semi-normal, although the two classes within 12 hours thing is personally a bit much. Two days to go, let's cruise it home.

Day 29

A stickler guest teacher plus an unusually hot - and full - class

seems to create a perfect storm, making this my hardest class so far. Darkest hour is just before the...Dawn collapses? For the first time, I'm out of reserves, and have to sit out several postures. He's entertaining enough, with an almost evangelistic Tony Robbins vibe. "Bikram is 90 minutes of self-love," he proclaims. I am temporarily diverted from my nausea by imagining an alternative interpretation of the action in the room.

Day 30

Another night-then-day duo - same teacher, same high heat and almost the same difficulty. Cue the second-hardest class of the 30, right at the end.

There's a neatness to the suffering though, reminding me to have humility and come in fresh every day.