



Caution:

Room temperatures everywhere are soaring with the rising popularity of hot yoga.

Hana Schoon investigates.

“**L**ook Good Naked”, stated the challenge, and there was no way to turn such a proposition down. One thing led to another and next, I found myself spending a Sunday afternoon at Bikram Yoga City Hall. Bikram yoga is a form of hot yoga, with a sequence of 26 postures and two breathing exercises, which burns up to 600 calories in a class. One can expect to develop lean muscle tone and strength over repeated sessions.

For a first-timer, hot yoga takes time getting used to. For starters, you break into a sweat the moment you step in, feeling like a *dim sum* dish in the making. Well, if you step into a room heated up to 40 degrees, that’s a sure-fire guarantee. Even though I’ve dabbled in Hatha yoga a few years ago, having it hot is a different thing altogether. First there’s the heat that takes time getting used

to, and secondly, there are the moves that budge every part of your body, rousing muscles you never knew existed and detoxing your system simultaneously.

The benefits are numerous and a few sessions is all it takes to feel the awakening in your body, rave fans like editor Liana Garcellano and teacher May Lim, who have been practicing for over four years. “Yoga always has this calming effect on me, putting my problems into perspective. And I sleep so well after an evening session,” shares Liana. May adds, “After class, I feel all-woman and invincible – like I’m able to take on anything the world throws at me.” Flexibility is perhaps the most obvious difference – both women relate how they are able to go deeper into the poses.

Working out in a heated environment helps your muscles become more relaxed and pliable,

which allow you to work deeper in a shorter amount of time as well as help prevent injury. The heat expedites the flow of blood to improve circulation. Also, fatty acids are better mobilised in-the heat, which helps burn fat more efficiently, says Diane Lee, founder and director of Bikram Yoga City Hall. The heat helps give you a deeper, more intense workout than other forms of yoga, and helps the body rid toxins through sweat, says Master Vempalla Nagajurna Reddy (Omkar), instructor with True Yoga.

As with all yoga classes, it is best to go on an empty stomach – no food two to three hours before. A class typically lasts about 90 minutes, half an hour longer than the usual yoga ones. Each posture is repeated twice before moving on to the next. The moves are faster and you get into one pose

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HOT!



Hot Yoga During Pregnancy

Can pregnant women do hot yoga? The debate rages on, but generally the consensus is this – hot yoga is fine only if you have been practising on a regular basis for some time prior to pregnancy. You can start classes from your fourth month onwards, right up to delivery, says Diane Lee, founder and director of Bikram Yoga City Hall.

Sales engineer Agnes Low, 35, eight months pregnant with her second child, is an ardent devotee, having joined Bikram Yoga City Hall since it opened last year. "I came back right after my first trimester was over, after my doctor gave the okay," she shares, "there's nothing like the endurance and stamina that builds over time, as you go deeper into the poses." Agnes previously tried prenatal yoga but found

them too easy and wanted more. Some of the poses have been modified to accommodate her growing belly and to avoid any compression on the womb.

For expecting mothers who have never tried hot yoga before, it's best to err on the side of caution and save it for the post-birth workout. Dr Juliana Abu Wong, Dr Choo Wan Ling, and Dr Ann Tan, consultant obstetricians & gynaecologists from the Pacific Healthcare Group, point out that a rise in body temperature is not recommended as it can lead to problems in foetal development, especially in the first trimester.

"Women are cautioned not to exercise for more than 40 minutes continuously," advises Dr Choo, "it's a good idea to take your body

temperature and ensure it does not go beyond 39.2°C."

Once you've crossed over into the second trimester, prenatal yoga is an excellent avenue to explore. "Yoga techniques can increase overall strength, flexibility and a sense of well-being," says True Yoga instructor, Master Omkar. "During labour, it also helps reduce anxiety by helping a mother in labour to find her own inner rhythm with the breathing techniques." He also points out that yoga has the ability to strengthen the spine and encourage the lower back to lengthen downwards, enabling the uterus to be cupped securely in the pelvis. This way, the baby's weight is borne through the hips and legs rather than on the lower back.

straight after another, with not much time to catch your breath in between. Together with the heat, you're gearing towards a full body workout with sweat dripping from every pore. It is important to drink fluids throughout the day and during class to stay well hydrated. Your body is losing water rapidly; so don't forget to load up. Attire-wise, less is more. A sports bra, tank top and shorts work best. Once you get into the moves, you'd wish you could take it all off!

That night, I slept like a baby, probably my best snooze in years. The morning after was another story altogether. I had to be hauled out of bed for work as newly minted muscles cried out. And strangely, pain can be an invigorating thing and I've never felt more alive. ■