



CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS IRON YOGA?

Yoga is such an incredible discipline for the mind, body, and spirit. It's no wonder the ancient ritual has been practiced all over the world for more than 5,000 years and is more popular in the United States today than ever before. Virtually anyone can practice yoga. Whether you are looking to lose a few pounds and tone your body; delay the aging process and expand longevity; recover from an ailment, disorder, or injury; train the mind and body for sport and competition; or just live the yoga lifestyle, incorporating the practice of yoga into your life can be tremendously rewarding and beneficial to your overall health and well-being.

There are many different styles of yoga. The most traditional forms are called Hatha. Hatha yoga originated in ancient India and represents the physical aspect of yoga. Through a series of poses involving physical strength and stamina as well as breathing exercises, Hatha yoga was developed as a means to meditation.

Over the years, Hatha yoga has been modified to reflect the teachings of a particular organization or teacher. You've probably heard of yoga classes called *Ashtanga*, *Iyengar*, *Viniyoga*, *Kundalini*, *Kripalu*, *Bikram*, and *Power Yoga*. These are all styles of Hatha yoga, each emphasizing different breathing techniques and a different physicality. Some styles can be very physically demanding, while others are more meditative and contemplative.

Ashtanga yoga is known for its fast-paced movements in which postures flow from one

to another (this flow is called vinyasa). Iyengar yoga involves precise alignment and symmetry. Viniyoga uses the breath along with movement and is slower paced. Kundalini's purpose is to awaken the "serpent power" within us through breath control, chanting, and meditation. In Kripalu yoga, three stages of postures lead to a spontaneous meditation in motion. Bikram yoga is a sequence of 26 poses held for up to 10 seconds, practiced in a room heated between 80° and 105°F.

Finally, one of the newest and most popular styles is called Power Yoga. Power Yoga combines traditional Hatha yoga poses with fluid movements and deep-breathing techniques to create a high-energy workout. Although Power Yoga moves faster than Viniyoga, it does incorporate meditation and breathing along with movement and encourages students to listen to their bodies. Over the past few years, the many styles and variations of yoga have expanded into the entire fitness field. No longer is yoga confined to special schools and exclusive spas—you can now find yoga classes in just about every gym, health club, and recreation center across the country.

Yoga's popularity as a form of fitness and physical exercise has allowed me to add this new dimension of combining weight-training exercises using light dumbbells with Power Yoga poses.

With Power Yoga as the foundation, the essence of Iron Yoga is the beautiful synergy between weight training and yoga. Weight training is a discipline that requires a connection between mind and muscle, while yoga is an art form that connects mind, body, and spirit. When the two are combined in my Iron Yoga practice, you benefit physically, mentally, and spiritually.

When you are working out in the gym or at home with machines or free weights for the upper body—say chest or back, shoulders or arms—you are generally targeting one specific muscle group at a time. Iron Yoga is an incredibly intense, challenging, full-body workout because when you are balancing on one leg, for example, you are performing a series of exercises for your upper body like some of the ones you may be familiar with: Shoulder Overhead Press, Triceps Kickback, and Chest Flye. What's so unique about Iron Yoga is that while you are in a Power Yoga pose, your legs are active, your abdominal region is engaged, and every weight-training movement is controlled by breath and performed with continuous tension through a full range of motion. In the next chapter, you'll learn more about these principles and techniques for practicing Iron Yoga.

BENEFITS OF IRON YOGA

What makes Iron Yoga distinctive is that it has the combined benefits of yoga and weight training all in one workout. Iron Yoga will help you . . .

Improve lean muscle mass. Increased lean muscle helps fire up your metabolism and assist with losing weight. The more lean muscle mass you have, the easier it will be to control and maintain your weight. Muscle acts like a fat-burning machine. When you're losing weight, the goal is to replace fat with lean muscle. Performing a variety of weight-training exercises with low-weight resistance executed in a slow and controlled manner is a great way to stimulate lean muscle.

Increase your flexibility and range of motion. When your body is tight and stiff, you are more likely to get injured. This applies to playing your favorite sport or performing everyday activities like carrying groceries and pushing the baby stroller. Iron Yoga helps you keep your muscles and joints limber and active.

Sharpen your mental focus and concentration skills. The Iron Yoga practice increases oxygen and bloodflow to the brain. It helps keep your mind focused no matter what you're doing—whether you're running a marathon or working on a business proposal. A focused mind can better handle the rigors of everyday life.

Develop proper breathing techniques. One of the best ways to reduce stress and tension is through deep breathing. When you consider that by some estimates, 80 percent of all illness is stress related, you'll probably find that practicing Iron Yoga can help keep you out of the doctor's office.

Enhance your functional strength and muscular endurance in your legs and core areas. Good posture is important to so many aspects of a healthy life. Whether you're sitting or standing, awareness of the muscles in your legs and core helps you keep your body in proper alignment. Muscular endurance and functional strength are also important to enhance any cardio activity such as running, cycling, swimming, skiing, and rowing.

Create balance and symmetry. Your body wants to naturally balance. This centering of your body and creating symmetry is so vital to your overall health and well-being. When your body is out of balance, it is often very common to feel fatigued or become ill or injured. If your mind is agitated or wandering, you'll probably end up swaying and wobbling. Iron Yoga helps to restore symmetry and rejuvenate your whole body.

IRON YOGA POSES

There are many types of yoga movements. Some movements, such as balancing poses, are more active and challenging. Others are more passive and meditative. The Iron Yoga practice incorporates four types of yoga poses:

STANDING POSES

These poses are the foundation of the Iron Yoga practice. Whether you are standing on two feet or balancing on one leg, standing poses help to center your body and your mind and help you feel grounded. The physical challenge of standing or balancing creates strength and stability for your lower body. Some examples of standing poses are Chair (see page 42), Tree (see page 51), Warrior 2 (see page 73) and Warrior 3 (see page 108), and Crescent Lunge (see page 78).

SEATED POSES

While standing poses challenge your body and mind, seated poses are more reflexive and meditative. Many of the seated poses in Iron Yoga require flexibility of the lower back and spine. Some examples are Seated Wide Angle Sequence (see page 159), Seated Forward Bend (see page 155), and Bound Angle (see page 156).

PRONE POSES

These are poses performed when you are facing the floor, either on your hands and knees or simply lying on your stomach. Prone poses are very good for strengthening your shoulders and back. These are very active and demanding poses. Some examples are Bird Dog/Flying Airplane (see page 137) and Locust (see page 144).

SUPINE POSES

These are poses performed when you are lying on your back. While prone poses activate and build strength, supine poses help you relax and release tension. Lying on the floor is a great way to feel alignment and symmetry. An example of a supine pose is Reclined Twist (see page 154).

IRON YOGA MOVEMENTS

The weight-training movements in Iron Yoga improve lean muscle mass and build strength in the upper body. The Iron Yoga practice incorporates two basic types of weight-training movements you should become familiar with:

ISOLATION MOVEMENTS

An isolation movement targets only one muscle group, such as your biceps or triceps. This is also called a single-joint movement because only one joint comes into play. For example, when working your biceps and triceps, the joint in play is your elbow. Isolation movements are great for sculpting and toning a specific muscle. Two good examples of isolation movements are the Concentration Curl (see page 76) and Triceps Kickback (see page 109).

COMPOUND MOVEMENTS

A compound movement combines two or more joints and targets large or primary muscle groups. Some fitness experts consider compound movements more efficient than isolation movements because you work several muscles at once. The Chest Press (see page 55) and Lat Pulldown (see page 54) are good examples of compound movements because they target the large muscles of your chest and back respectively and involve two joints—elbow and shoulder.