

# yoga

## Which flavor suits your taste?

By Karen Bannan

An increasing number of fitness fans are turning to yoga for its benefits in stretching and toning the body, as well as providing stress relief. But not many of us are aware of just how many different types of yoga are available. *Your Energy challenge:* Choosing the type of yoga that's right for your fitness level and style.

Author Victoria Moran, whose recent books include *My Yoga Journal*, began practicing yoga at age 17. She taught hatha yoga for six years and studied yoga in depth in India.

Classic hatha yoga involves "slow, gentle postures," Victoria explained. "These postures, called asanas, are believed to have benefits for the organs and glands," as well as toning your muscles and limbering your joints. If you take a hatha yoga class, you can expect breathing and relaxation exercises.

One popular subset of hatha yoga is Iyengar yoga. This "precision practice" includes more standing postures than classic hatha yoga, which has more mat work, the yoga expert



Photo by Rod Walker

noted. In addition, Iyengar yoga "uses various yoga props, such as bands and blocks, to assist progress and prevent injury."

In contrast, Kundalini yoga "is designed to challenge the body and awaken latent spiritual energies. The movements are synchronized with breathing, often rapid," and by the time the class has ended, you definitely feel as if you worked out,

according to Victoria.

Two yoga forms that are increasingly popular today in the United States are Bikram yoga and Ashtanga yoga. Bikram yoga, another relative of hatha yoga, "is known for a systematic posture routine practiced in a hot room (over 100 degrees Fahrenheit) to encourage sweating and elimination of toxins," she says. "The heat is also believed to prevent injury and warm muscles so they can stretch further and more easily."

Sometimes referred to as "power yoga," Ashtanga consists of a series of postures performed "in one continuous movement with a strong tie to the breath," Victoria noted.

### So which type is right for you?

Victoria suggests using these guidelines:

- **In good shape?** Try Ashtanga to "challenge you and get all those endorphins running through your system."
- **Been skipping your workouts or just starting a fitness program?** "You might prefer starting with something gentler like Hatha yoga or a beginner's Iyengar class."
- **Love variety?** Try a mixture of approaches such as one Kundalini and one Iyengar class each week.