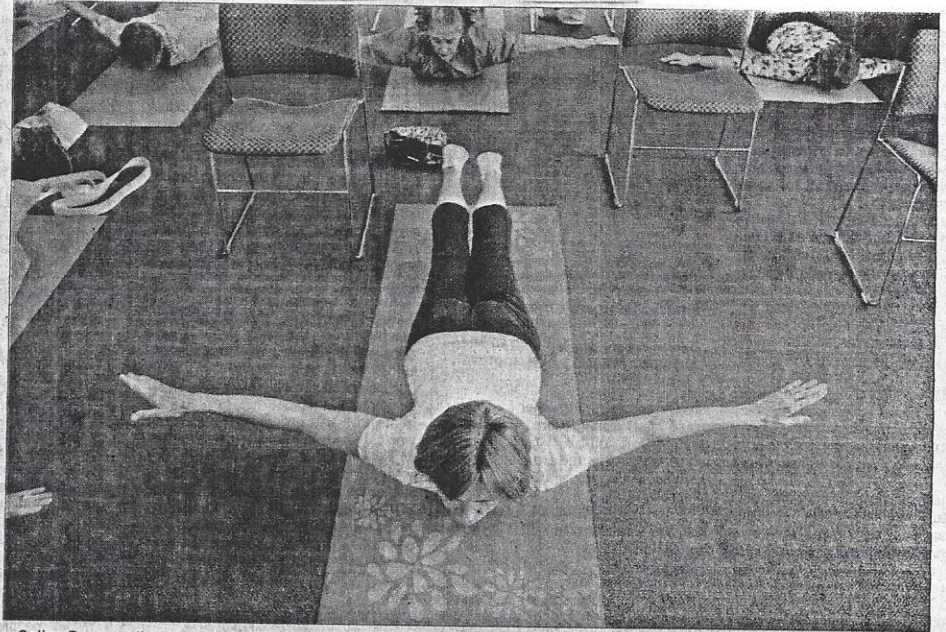


## Life, etc.

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Galina Popova allows only her abdomen to touch the mat during a yoga class at the Duke Center for Integrative Medicine. The Mayo Clinic says yoga can help some health conditions when combined with standard treatment.

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# Prescription: Yoga

More Americans are partaking of the holistic 'drug' for body and mind

JOE MILLER  
CORRESPONDENT

**Y**oga helps Darlene Jonas cope with Parkinson's disease, enables scientist Lynn Conley to sit at his desk for long stretches, lets Bill Glasheen keep playing golf and has helped Nancy Wren cope with the death of her husband. Robin Kneeburg credits yoga with saving her life.

Once perceived as the domain of the uber fit, lithe and limber, yoga is being increasingly embraced as a kind of holistic drug for a plethora of physical and emotional issues.

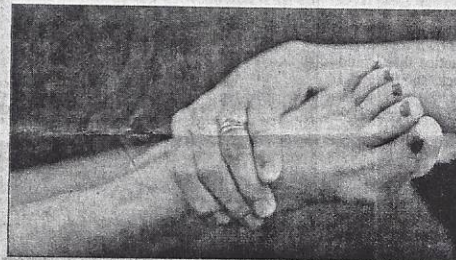
Yoga, according to the Mayo Clinic, can help with cancer and high blood pressure, and anxiety, depression and insomnia.

"While you shouldn't expect yoga to cure you or offer 100 percent relief," advises the Rochester, Minn.-based research, education and health-care provider, "it can help some health conditions when combined with standard treatment."

According to a 2008 survey by the Yoga Journal, about 16 million Americans practice some form of yoga, and nearly half took up yoga "to improve their overall health." A similar study in 2003 put that number at just 5.6 percent.

"It's not a cure, but a better way of life," says Glasheen, a 73-year-old Monroe resident who credits yoga with helping him not miss a Sunday morning tee time in more than a decade despite the crippling effects of Parkinson's disease.

Four years ago, Wren's hus-



Helene Suh stretches her legs behind her back during a yoga class at Duke.

## FIND THE RIGHT FIT

Wondering how the yoga class at your gym - filled with the fit and fashionable performing acrobatics - could possibly help your lumbago?

"There are many American yogas out there," says instructor Nancy Nicholson. Some, she notes emphasize the physical, some are more embracing of the broader mind/body/spirit notion of yoga.

When searching for a class:

- Ask what kind of yoga they practice - then Google it.
- Ask about the class' focus. Many will be clear about whether the class is more about stress management, meditation, physical accomplishment or something else.
- Is it beginner-friendly? Some classes are good about offering options to novices.
- What about the teacher's background and credentials? Knowing her or his certifications can help you research whether a particular type of yoga is good for you.

band Tom started attending a yoga class to help with his Parkinson's. She joined in, quickly realizing the physical relief yoga offered from the demands of helping her 300-pound, wheelchair-bound husband. When Tom died two years ago, she quit going to class. It was then,

as she struggled to deal with her loss, that she realized she needed yoga more than ever.

"It helped me to sit and be calm, to focus my mind so I'm not flying all over the place with a million thoughts," says Wren, who is 61. "It helped me get hold of my emotions."

## A kinder, gentler yoga

The practice of yoga predates written history, going back at least 5,000 years. While its origins are uncertain, its focus has been to help achieve total health through exercise, breathing and meditation.

Instructor Nancy Nicholson, a licensed clinical social worker certified in various yoga techniques, explains: "The breathing exercises help to calm, to focus the mind. It can be very grounding."

If you're considering yoga, talk to your doctor. Physicians are becoming well-versed in yoga and its applications for various maladies.

Perhaps most important, see whether you can sit in on a class before signing up, and pay close attention to how the teacher interacts with students.

During a recent Gentle Yoga class at Duke Integrative Medicine in Durham, instructor Carol Krucoff approached one of her students and said, "Your expression tells me this (move) isn't good for you."

She then recommended a less taxing variation. Pain, she emphasizes, is not part of healing yoga.

"It should be challenging," she says, "but not straining."

Conley, 54, was already having back issues when he and his wife, Anne, moved to Durham from San Diego three years ago. The stress of a new job didn't help, nor did six months of physical therapy. "That" only made it

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# YOGA

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worse," he says.

Anne, who is 58, had been doing yoga for her back problem, and Conley decided to follow suit, enrolling in a Gentle Yoga class taught by Krucoff at the Duke Center for Integrative Medicine.

It was a good fit: Krucoff had spent years experimenting with her own yoga to develop a practice that would help the neck, shoulder and back issues she had developed hunching over a keyboard as a journalist. (She wrote a book on the subject, "Healing Yoga for Neck & Shoulder Pain," published last year.)

The focused exercises make it possible for Conley to sit at his desk for the long stretches required of a Research Triangle Park scientist, while the breathing exercises help him deal with job stress. Relaxing is no longer a problem.

"Didn't you hear him snoring?" Anne asks after a recent yoga class.

## A healer of pain

In 2005, Robin Kneeburg was living a normal life in California. Then, overnight, her body became permeated with pain. Though her doctors were able to attribute the pain to a repetitive motion injury, they were mystified by its origins and how to deal with it.

"It shut me down," says the 42-year-old Kneeburg. "It hurt to breathe. It hurt to cough."

Three years ago, she and her husband heard about the

Duke Center for Integrative Medicine and decided to move to Durham and give it a try. She met with a team that included everyone from a neurologist to Krucoff. Gentle yoga was prescribed as part of her treatment.

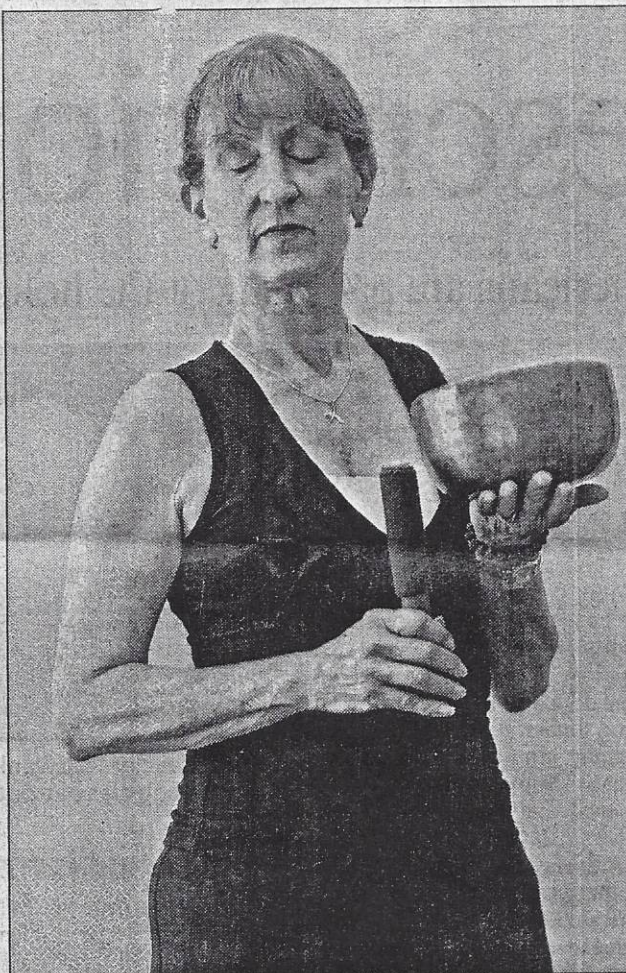
"When she first came here," says Krucoff, "she couldn't even get down on the floor."

After three years of Kneeburg being in constant pain, the class' emphasis on

breathing, focusing the mind and movement resulted in a breakthrough: "It didn't hurt to breathe anymore," she says. Kneeburg continues to make progress, and though she isn't pain-free, she says she's getting there.

"It's ongoing improvement," Kneeburg says of her progress through yoga. "I did better this week than I could last week." She pauses, then adds:

"This is freedom for me."



Yoga instructor Carol Krucoff uses a chime to awaken her yoga class from deep meditation.

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