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Try Bikram Yoga

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Sweat -- whether glistening on a calf twisted into eagle pose or trickling down a back arched into camel pose -- is everywhere. The sultry scene is part of the hottest exercise in town. Literally. It's **Bikram** yoga, a workout performed in a room heated to 105 degrees. The class lasts 90 minutes, and when students leave, they're drenched.

Bikram Choudhury developed his offshoot based on hatha yoga practices. In the 1970s, he opened a studio in Los Angeles and became a yogi to celebrities including Shirley MacLaine and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (Madonna was a later adherent). Choudhury went on to establish schools around the world and now certifies teachers who want to open studios. Today, there are about 800 official **Bikram** studios worldwide.

Proponents say the sweltering temperature warms up muscles quickly, allowing for easier extension and stretching. They also claim it detoxifies and tones the body, relieves stress, improves posture, promotes better sleep, and even alleviates symptoms of chronic illness. Several studies are examining yoga's benefits, but science has yet to confirm the advantages of **Bikram**. For now, experts recommend that beginners start slowly and get a doctor's okay before taking a class.

What to expect: **Bikram** yoga has 26 postures and two breathing exercises that work the body through contraction and extension. The poses, always performed in the same order, include standing postures and a floor series. Carolan Sudol, who opened **Bikram** Yoga Dupont in January, says it takes about two weeks to adjust to the heat, and beginners may feel nauseated or light-headed. If that happens, Sudol says, beginners should stop and sit quietly on the mat but try to stay in the heated room. Drinking plenty of water before, during and after class will help alleviate any discomfort.

What to bring: Lightweight, close-fitting clothing (you'll practice barefoot), a mat and a large beach towel.

Cost: Single classes are \$13 to \$15. Monthly and class packages are also available. Studios usually rent towels and mats, though many students bring their own.

Notes: Come to class well hydrated, and bring water. Don't eat for at least two hours before class.

Places to practice **Bikram**

Bikram Yoga Baltimore. Yorktowne Shopping Plaza, 122 Cranbrook Rd., Cockeysville. 410-683-9642. www.bikramyogabaltimore.com. The large studio has a one-week intro special for \$20. Single classes cost \$15, a 10-class pass \$130. Monthly and yearly memberships and student and senior discounts are available.

Bikram Yoga Dupont. 1635 Connecticut Ave. NW. 202-332-8680. www.bikramyogadc.com. The small studio offers a one-week intro special for \$20. Single classes cost \$15, a 10-class pass \$125. Monthly and yearly memberships and student discounts are available.

Bikram Yoga Rockville. 10062 Darnestown Rd., Rockville. 301-762-9642. www.bikramyogarockville.com. The studio offers a one-week intro special for \$20. Single classes cost \$15, a 10-class pass to be used in one month \$130. Monthly memberships and senior and student discounts are available.

D.C. **Bikram** Yoga. 4908 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-243-3000. www.dcbikramyoga.com. The studio is run by a retired U.S. Army officer. A single class costs \$13, a 12-class pass to be used in one month \$110. Monthly and yearly memberships and student discounts are available.