

WORKING OUT WITH YOGA'S NEW MESSIAH

Sometimes you just need a full mind-body workout. That's where Maya Fiennes, yoga's Nigella Lawson, fits in, says **Sophie Goodchild**

MAYA Fiennes is one of the most in-demand relaxation teachers around. Elle Macpherson describes a session with her as "inspirational, energising, sexy", which makes her yoga's equivalent of Nigella Lawson. Just as Nigella gave cooking mass appeal, Fiennes, 46, has a vision to transform the image of yoga. The former concert pianist, sister-in-law of actors Ralph and Joseph, says: "There is still this perception that it's a bit alien, that you have to be some sort of groupie. But it's not like that. Anyone can practise, from kids to 90-year-olds."

Her own style of yoga is called Kundalini, which is explained in Fiennes's new book called *Yoga for Real Life*. Increasingly popular in the UK, this technique is aimed at giving a full mind-body workout. It's particularly beneficial, says Fiennes, for Londoners suffering from technology burnout. "Our minds get cluttered with constant demands from emails and mobile phones. It's vital to offload," she says.

Macedonia-born Maya discovered Kundalini yoga while training at London's Royal College of Music. It greatly helped her pre-performance nerves and she says yoga and meditation are now "essential" to her life. They have helped with post-natal depression and even stopped her from drowning.

Yoga for Real Life is a self-help guide

full of personal anecdotes about coping with marriage (to composer Magnus), work and being a mother-of-two. Maya recently moved from Fulham to Santa Monica in California and teaches classes around the world. But this month, she is hosting a special Kundalini session at Alchemy in Chalk Farm.

THE ESSENTIAL KUNDALINI WARM-UP

■ **Easy Pose:** Maya showed me how to sit on the floor with my legs crossed, back straight and shoulders relaxed. This helps release energy by aligning your body, mind and spirit.

■ **Gyan Mudra:** a simple hand position, where you touch your index finger with your thumbs.

■ **Root Lock:** suck in your navel, squeezing and pulling up the muscles around your stomach, anus and sex organs. The aim, says Maya, is to "uncoil the Kundalini energy at the base of the spine".

■ **Corpse Pose:** a relaxation pose where you focus on your breathing and empty your mind. Lie on your back with hands out to the side and palms upwards. Tilt your chin forwards, breathe deeply and relax every part of



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your body from your feet to your tongue, eyes and forehead.

MAYA'S GUIDE TO LOVING AND LIVING, TAKEN FROM HER BOOK MAKE EYE CONTACT

There are always things you'd like to change in your partner. A challenge is maintaining the sense of joy in your sex life. When I work with couples, sometimes I ask them to look into each other's eyes or touch each other's heart. It's incredible how many have never done this.

WRITE YOUR OWN MANTRA

We're rarely in real physical danger but anything from a work deadline to rush-hour traffic will get our adrenaline pumping. But like most fuel, it eventually runs out. The key is to develop a "slow down" mantra to clear mental clutter and stimulate the immune system.

LOOSEN YOUR SPINE

Ageing is something many of us fear but none of us can avoid. As you get older, you get rigid in the spine: yoga can strengthen it. Even if you're young and doing lots of aerobic exercise, you need to stretch your body and give the joints space to relax after a workout.

EAT 'MINDFULLY'

Some yogis say you should be a teetotal vegetarian. I'm not one of them. I enjoy a glass of wine, a cup of good coffee, and red meat when I feel my body needs it. Calorie-counting will make you miserable and probably also fat. But it's important to chew food properly, and eat five light meals a day. Eat "mindfully" by focusing on your food. Look at what is on your plate and think about where it's from.

BE A YOGA MUMMY

Yoga can be a great way to prepare for birth. I got post-natal depression and had not practised yoga for weeks before the birth of my first daughter. Then I put some simple yoga sets together. After a few days the clouds had lifted.

■ *Yoga for Real Life*, Atlantic Books, £14.99, available now. Yoga class with Maya: 18 January at Alchemy, Unit 101, Stables Market, NW1 (www.alchemythecentre.co.uk, 020 7267 6188/£15 for a session)

FITNESS FACTOR

SWEDERCISE

What? A gym class run by the Swedish non-profit exercise organisation Friskis & Svettis held at the Central YMCA by Tottenham Court Road. The "Swedercise" workout gets 30-odd people to exercise in a circle to music following a seven-step programme.

How hard was it? Very tough, hence the English translation of its name "healthy and sweaty," but you almost can't help smiling by the end. A tirelessly cheery Johan revs the crowd up with hearty jumps followed by slow stretching to soften the muscles. Then he cranks up the Swedish pop tunes and the strength-training starts. Far harder than it looks, this involves exercising each part of the body in time to the music – I discovered muscles I didn't know existed, almost crunching the backs of my thighs to breaking point. Then comes power walking or running



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in a circle, the warm-down, more stretching and 10 minutes' relaxation.

Calories burned? 600+ in 50 minutes.

Ready for more? There's almost a smile-only entry policy here so I won't be allowed back unless my grin reaches my ears – something I can't guarantee

after a long day's work. It was a relief to finish but, after my Christmas binge, I have to admit this is a great fat burner.

Try it out: £5/class or £40/10 classes, Central YMCA (112 Great Russell St, WC1, 020 7343 1844, www.friskissvettis.co.uk)

Victoria Stewart

BEAUTY SPOT

THE CLASSY CLEAVAGE

IF you're going to leave little to the imagination like Heather Mills and her extreme cleavage in her promo shot for *Dancing on Ice*, at least keep it classy.

Shula Starkey, founder of Ark Age Aware Skincare, says: "Tending to this area can take years off your appearance. Use facial products, exfoliate the skin, apply rich moisturiser daily and a mask twice a week to stimulate circulation."

To achieve a flawless décolletage, try ARK's bust-enhancing Cleavage Skin Response Facial to remove dead skin cells (£75/75mins, www.arkskincare.com) – rubbing The Sanctuary's Age Repair Hydrating Body Serum (£6.99, www.thesanctuary.com) in circular massage strokes will also make skin luminous.

Victoria Stewart



Busting on ice: Heather Mills