



Troubled by controversial claims that yoga can wreck your body, KAT TANCOCK takes a cold, hard look at the practice she loves

IANE FERREIG THOUGHT SHE would be doing her body a favour when she got an unlimited yoga pass for just \$50 a month. A 28-year-old student in Toronto at the time, she wanted an antidote for long days spent sitting and stressing. She went to the physically demanding Ashtanga classes five days a week, until one day, while doing downward dog, she fell and dislocated her shoulder.

Back then she blamed her sweaty palms, but these days Ferreig, now a yoga therapist helping people in Toronto and Montreal improve their health through yoga, understands there were other factors at play. First, she says, her ego got in the way: "I hadn't learned yet to go at my own pace instead of trying to keep up with the class." Second, she now realizes she'd been downward-dogging wrong the whole time, straining her shoulders, and

her teacher, tasked with handling too large a class, failed to notice.

As a yoga devotee for 16 years and now a teacher myself, I'm a true believer in the practice's benefits: It helped me conquer a teenage back injury and, more recently, rehabbed a nasty knee sprain that left me limping for weeks. So when I first read the recent *New York Times Magazine* article alleging a silent epidemic of yoga injuries (excerpted from journalist William J. Broad's book, *The Science of Yoga*), my knee-jerk reaction was to brush off the anecdotes of over-the-top behaviour—like the guy who sat on his heels for hours at a time—as outliers, people who made dumb decisions and got the injuries they deserved.

But then I realized that aside from those drastic cases, Broad was calling attention to real problems. After all, I know first-hand how challenging it is for teachers to guide

students into even basic alignments. When taking classes I often spot students doing off-kilter poses, or exerting themselves so hard I fear they'll have an aneurysm right then and there—never mind develop subtle injuries such as the nagging pain in my left shoulder when I overdo sun salutations.

Yoga isn't hockey, and getting beat up shouldn't be part of the package. But the truth is, many people are doing moves they shouldn't be—and getting hurt in the process.

AN INJURY EPIDEMIC?

It's hard to pinpoint how many people get hurt doing yoga. In the U.S., the Consumer Product Safety Commission counted more than 7,000 injuries treated in doctor's offices and ERs in 2010—mainly overstretching and repetitive strain in the neck, shoulders, spine, legs >

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