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Yoga – chill out or challenge

A Sunday morning relaxing class? Or an intense physical and mental challenge. The latter sentence may be best used to describe other sports, and would not, until recently, have been ascribed to yoga which has a reputation of a mostly female crowd attempting to become more supple and promote inner tranquillity in a room smelling faintly of patchouli – no sweat allowed.

However the British Yoga Championships, in itself causing controversy due to its departure from the traditional yoga philosophical framework has highlighted a growing yoga genre – Bikram Yoga.

Bikram Yoga, which has seen an unprecedented growth in popularity in recent years – involves exercising in a 40C heat. Bikram Choudhury, created this latest yoga craze by devising a 26-step sequence of postures. Bikram Yoga boasts celebrity clientele such as George Harrison and Madonna.

Whether you are supportive of yoga as a competitive sport or prefer the more chilled out approach, we may yet see yoga in the 2012 Olympics!

The thin gene – are you blessed with it?

Obesity – its a growing problem and if things don't change experts predict that Britain is facing a pandemic in coming years. But what about the other end of the scale. Is your size 6 friend who claims she can 'eat anything and not put on weight' telling the truth, or is she lying about what she eats, or worse, in the grips of an eating disorder.

Dr Rudy Leibel of Columbia University, New York, believes we all have a biologically determined natural weight which our bodies make an effort to stick to, whether it is fat or thin.

"The body will constantly tend to try to bring you back to whatever your normal body weight is," he says.

But he does not think this is the full story. There are other issues that influence a person's weight. "Fifty per cent is down to genes and the rest is probably down to environment. If you get the gene for Huntington's you have the disease 100% of the time. That's certainly not the case with obesity."

But before you reach for the biscuit tin, or blame your burgeoning waist line on your genes, remember that weight is just one indicator of health. Your body fat percentage, bmi, water hydration levels and dress size all help give an indication of how healthy you are and should all be taken into consideration when managing your health and fitness through your exercise, diet and lifestyle.

Good and Bad Fats

Eating saturated fats from butter, cream and meat, as well as trans fats found in hydrogenated oils can boost our risk of cardiovascular disease, while consuming mono-unsaturated fat can be good for our heart.

Yet what's the effect of all these fats on our weight? Are some better than others?

"Research on animals and some clinical trials show that not all fats have the same effect on weight," says Nadiah Moussavi, a Master's student from the Université de Montréal Department of Nutrition. "Few epidemiological studies exist on the subject and the results of those are contradictory."

The goal of the work is to see whether a connection could be made between the prevalence of obesity and the various forms of fat found in the 168 countries around the world.

So before you start banning all fat from your diet, ensure that you are consuming some level of good fats and limit those bad ones!

The Good Fats

- 1) Monosaturated Fats – nuts, walnuts, avocados, olive oil
- 2) Polyunsaturated Fats – salmon and fish oil

The Bad Fats

- 1) Saturated Fats – coconut, palm and palm kernel oils
- 2) Trans Fats – such as those in heavily packaged and processed foods