

Turn back the years WITH KUNDALINI YOGA

Kundalini yoga is rumoured to boost brain power, increase energy levels and have an anti-ageing effect. Time to give it a go

WORDS: Eve Boggendoel



Radiant energy, peace of mind, better sex, a youthful glow... it's little wonder kundalini yoga is having a moment. Studios are rescheduling timetables to meet demand, students are signing up for teacher training programmes and, if you want an energising home workout, you can even log on to Amazon Prime and stream one of 42 videos devoted to the subject. So why has the ancient practice, that's captivated the likes of Reese Witherspoon and Kate Hudson, suddenly become so popular?

"The beauty of kundalini is that it takes you beyond the clutter and confusion of everyday life to a place where you experience a sense of real freedom and stillness," says Kathryn McCuster, yoga teacher and author of *Everyday Kundalini* (Watkins, £14.99). What's more, its powerful effects are pretty much instant. "Kundalini yoga gives you an experience of wellness right away," agrees Hermanjot Kaur, kundalini yoga expert and founder of *Kundalini Yoga for Health* and *Kundalini Yoga for Happiness* DVDs (Amazon, £12.99). "You feel good," she says, "which is why people keep coming back to the practice again and again."

Sometimes referred to as the yoga of awareness, kundalini yoga was brought to the West in 1969 by the late Indian sage Yogi Bhaajan.

It's a practice that aims to awaken and expand your consciousness, in part by releasing a storehouse of energy and creativity said to reside at the base of your spine. And with side effects including a clearer, more focused mind, increased vitality and higher levels of facial collagen, its anti-ageing benefits are proving popular, too.

If you've never tried a kundalini class before, you might be in for a surprise. Practitioners often dress entirely in white as the colour said to protect you from negative influences and strengthen your sense of identity. "We ask you to wear white so that you will reflect what is outside and go within yourself," Bhaajan once explained.

But clothing isn't the only difference you'll find. While regular yoga classes initially focus on external form, kundalini is more concerned with your internal experience, which is why a typical class begins with the chant 'Ong Namo Guru Dev Namo' ('I call on the divine teacher within') to calm your busy mind and help you tune into an awareness beyond the ego. It then goes on to include breathing exercises and posture combinations followed in a specific order. Known as kriya, these mini sequences often consist of intense, dynamic moves each



carried out for three minutes, often accompanied by a powerful breathing technique known as breath of fire. Kriyas may also include mudras (healing and energy-balancing hand positions), bandhas (specific techniques to help contain energy, known as prana, in the body) and meditations.

Not sure how all this can help you look and feel younger? Kundalini yoga acts on the nervous and glandular systems, explains Kaur. But when it comes to anti-ageing benefits, it's the effect on the glands that's key: "Your glands saturate the body with internal healing serums, rejuvenating tissues and conditioning organs such as the skin and hair," she says. "When the glands are in balance, not only does the physical system become luminous and lithe, but the mind and the emotions also become balanced."

Tempted to give it a go? Try these five kundalini kriyas from the *Kundalini Yoga for Happiness* DVD and look forward to feeling refreshed, rejuvenated and full of energy!

THE MOVES



Breath of fire

You can use this simple technique anywhere to reset your energy levels and clear your mind. Sitting or kneeling comfortably with your eyes closed or open, inhale and exhale through your nose at an even, moderate pace. As you begin to build a rhythm, you'll notice your navel point will move in and out slightly – allow this to happen naturally, don't force it. Continue for 30 seconds to three minutes with eyes closed or open.

Health Benefits: Cleans and tones the lungs, detoxes the system, balances hormones, pumps oxygen and prana through body, and invigorates the mind.



Fists of anger

From kneeling, enclose both thumbs inside your fingers to make a fist in each hand. With bent elbows, make large backward circles with your arms as if you were doing backstroke. At the same time, make an 'O' shape with your lips and use the breath of fire technique, pumping your breath in time with your moving arms for up to three minutes. To finish, interlace your fingers, turn the palms away and extend your arms overhead. Inhale deeply and lift your torso. Imagine yourself surrounded by white shimmering light, then

exhale. Inhale and repeat twice more, then lower your hands to your knees on an exhalation

Health Benefits: Tones the upper arms, pumps the heart and neutralises negative emotion.



BODY

Cat/cow

Unlike traditional cat/cow pose, the kundalini version is done at a moderate to fast pace. Come onto all-fours, knees beneath your hips,

hands beneath your shoulders. Exhale, drop your tailbone and release your neck as you draw your navel to your spine and arc your spine upwards. Inhale and tilt your tailbone to the ceiling as you lift your neck and chest to look upwards, allowing your back to arch naturally. Build up a rhythm until you can move quite quickly between each pose, continuing for three minutes

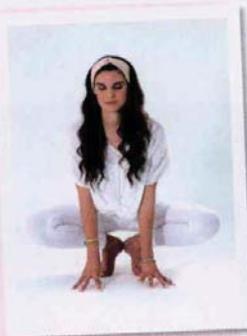
Health Benefits: Hydrates the spinal discs, increases and pumps cerebrospinal fluid around the body, produces more facial collagen. Provides healing for organs, glands, bloodstream, plus increases clarity of mind, vibrancy and a radiant sense of being.

Frog squats

Stand with your heels together and toes out, then lift your heels and lower into a kundalini frog squat, fingertips resting on the mat for balance. Keeping your heels together and raised, inhale to straighten your legs, buttocks up, nose to knees. Exhale as you come back down, keeping your knees outside your arms and lifting your head at the bottom of the move. Aim to stay on your

toes and keep your heels together throughout. Repeat 26 times. Finish with straight legs, release your neck and take three deep breaths, then come up on an inhale and shake the legs out

Health Benefits: Balances sexual energy and prana. Floods the brain with fresh oxygen, leaving you revitalised.



Sat nam

Sat nam can be translated as 'I am truth'. Kneel on your mat with your knees and feet together. Interlace your fingers, extending your index fingers and crossing your left thumb over your right (reverse the thumb position if you are a man) and extend your arms overhead.

Begin to repeat the word 'Sat' (pronounced like 'but') as you lift your torso and draw your navel point up and inwards followed by the word 'nam' (pronounced like 'harm') as you release your navel and your torso. Continue for one to three minutes. When finished, rest for a few moments on your back.

Health Benefits: Grounding, calms and clears the mind, brings a sense of peace, balances your energy, stimulates the endocrine system, strengthens the heart.

