A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a green tank top and black leggings, is sitting on a yoga mat. She is holding her right leg with both hands, pulling it towards her chest in a seated leg stretch. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a dark, textured wall.

**A NO-CHANTING,
NO-GRANOLA,
NO-SANSKRIT
PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO YOGA**

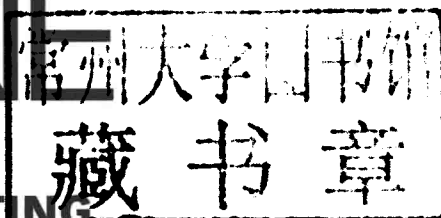
THE NO OM ZONE

**"The
new face
of yoga."**

—Sanjay Gupta, MD,
CNN chief medical
correspondent

KIMBERLY FOWLER

THE NO OM ZONE



A NO-CHANTING,
NO-GRANOLA,
NO-SANSKRIT

PRACTICAL GUIDE TO YOGA

KIMBERLY FOWLER

The information in this book is meant to supplement, not replace, proper exercise training. All forms of exercise pose some inherent risks. The editors and publisher advise readers to take full responsibility for their safety and know their limits. Before practicing the exercises in this book, be sure that your equipment is well-maintained, and do not take risks beyond your level of experience, aptitude, training, and fitness. The exercise and dietary programs in this book are not intended as a substitute for any exercise routine or dietary regimen that may have been prescribed by your doctor. As with all exercise and dietary programs, you should get your doctor's approval before beginning.

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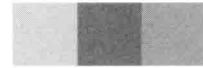
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We inspire and enable people to improve their lives and the world around them

To anyone who has ever stood outside
a yoga class looking for a way in . . .

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preface

When I first started doing yoga back in 1983, it was to rehabilitate my body from a biking accident. I was hit by a car in a race outside of Dallas, Texas. I broke my collarbone, and actually bent the handlebars of my bike with my face—not pretty. After my injuries healed, I could not lift my arm higher than my shoulder. My goal was to get my body back to the point where I could return to the sports that I love. I was competing in triathlons at the time, so my sports were running, biking, and swimming.

Yoga was a means to an end for me. My physical therapist at the time was also a yoga instructor and would have me do yoga poses to help rehabilitate my shoulder. I didn't seek out yoga—it sort of found me. At the time, I never thought that I would become a yoga instructor, let alone develop my own style of practice. I just wanted to get back on the road as quickly as possible. It was a bonus that I stayed injury-free and could compete at a higher level than I ever thought possible. I remember, years later, walking into a yoga studio in Los Angeles, California, looking around the room, and thinking, "This just isn't for me." I knew the benefits of yoga and loved the feeling it gave me. But as an athlete with a type A personality, I watched everyone in the class twist themselves into pretzels and thought, "Why can't I do these poses?" To add insult to injury, the class started with the instructor saying, "Okay, everybody in handstands."

Well, I don't know about you, but doing a handstand in the middle of the room with a bunch of people all around me wasn't my thing. For one thing, I had broken my collarbone a few times. However, even if I hadn't suffered those injuries, I'm not sure I could do it. So I sat there thinking, "I'm never coming here again." At that point I saw a guy walk in who was obviously new to yoga. The telltale sign was that he walked in with his shoes on and didn't take them off. He didn't know what was going on, and I wanted to help him. I knew he would never come back and never do yoga again once he understood what

would be expected of him in the class. I could so feel his pain. At that point I felt that I had to do something—it was a “Houston, we have a problem” moment. “How do I fix this? How can I help?” I thought. I never want someone to feel like that guy did in that yoga class. This book is for people like him.

My philosophy when it comes to yoga and, honestly, when it comes to most of the things I do in life, is to keep it simple. My motto in my classes is “safe, fun, and effective.” Yoga is such a great exercise/workout for anyone; whether you are a couch potato, a weekend warrior, or a professional athlete, you will benefit from doing some yoga. I’m not trying to turn you into a member of Cirque du Soleil. You will see results—even if you just do yoga at home for 10 minutes a few times a week, you will see added muscle tone, flexibility, and possibly even an attitude adjustment. You don’t have to give up your job, your sport, or anything that you love to do to go sit on a mountain and chant; that’s not what this book is about. What it *is* about is showing you some simple poses that will take away muscle aches, alleviate pain, and help you calm your mind. I just want you to be able to live your life or play your chosen sport without injuries, aches, and pains. You might fall in love with yoga or you might not. What you will love is how it makes you feel when you’re finished. I know taking a yoga class can be intimidating; I have been practicing for a long time, and it’s still intimidating to me. That was the catalyst to starting my business, YAS Fitness Centers, creating my own style of yoga called Yoga for Athletes,* and writing *The No OM Zone*!

Yoga Keeps You Calm and Keeps You Going

This book takes a very practical, no-nonsense look at a 5,000-year-old practice and explains how it applies in the 21st century. I decided to call this book *The No OM Zone* because chanting “Om” during a class was one of the first things that turned me off yoga. If this happened to you, I am hoping you will give me a chance to reintroduce you to the amazing physical benefits of this practice. Among some of the benefits you’ll discover: increased longevity; the ability to “stay in the game” no matter what your sport; and stress reduction, which in this fast-paced society is an extremely useful tool. With a simple “head-to-toe” approach, I break down the benefits of yoga for each major muscle group. I’ll give you modifications and suggestions for common injuries and different

sports. The goal is to keep you injury-free so you can “do what you love” for as long as you want. Some of the sports-related benefits of doing yoga are improved range of motion, increased muscle strength, and reduced post-workout soreness and muscle fatigue, which all add up to a big dose of injury prevention. Even if you’re not an athlete, you can also experience improved posture, body awareness, circulation, energy level, relaxation, and stress relief. One of the main goals of this book is to get past the “yoga stigma,” that is, it’s a religion, a cult, or just for the chosen few who can twist themselves into pretzels. The goal of *The No OM Zone* is not just to expose the masses to yoga (because at this point, who hasn’t heard of yoga?) but to teach you how to use yoga to your benefit even if you’re not into all the chanting, Sanskrit, and granola.

Get Off the Couch and onto a Mat

This book will also prepare you to feel comfortable and confident, like a pro, before you even walk into your first yoga class. You’ll find the answers to burning questions I get asked all the time, such as:

- What should I wear, or not wear, to my first yoga class?
- Should I buy a yoga mat?
- How do you find the right class?

I’ll also break down the different styles of yoga to help you identify what type of yoga best suits your personality and needs. Yoga is a multifaceted practice, and different styles produce different results. I’ll help you find the one that’s right for you.



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No Chanting, No Granola, No Sanskrit

The general attitude from people who don't do yoga, and even from some people who have tried a yoga class, is that it's a religion or a cult or only for people who can turn themselves into pretzels. Yoga can be very elitist, and off-putting, for the regular person on the street. This book is for those who have heard of yoga but haven't given it a try, or for those who have tried a class and thought, "This just isn't for me." Believe me, I can feel your pain, but I want you to give me a chance to change your mind. Don't worry, I'm not going to try to turn you into a pretzel—in fact, this is a "no pretzel zone." I don't want you to change your whole lifestyle, or to go sit on a mountaintop and chant! I just want you to be able to play your sport or live your life without injuries, aches, and pains.

What Is Chanting?

Chanting is the rhythmic speaking or singing of words or sounds, such as “Om,” which is used as part of many religious rituals. It’s very common in some of the more traditional yoga studios to chant in class. There is nothing wrong with chanting, if you subscribe to the spiritual side of yoga. However, for the purposes of this book, we are delving into the physical practice of yoga called Hatha Yoga.

Why No Granola?

One of the misconceptions about yoga is that it’s for “hippies.” Hippies are known for eating granola and wearing Birkenstock sandals. Yoga isn’t just for hippies—it’s for everyone.

This book takes a more practical interpretation of yoga. In most yoga books and Web sites, yoga is talked about as a cure for everything from migraines to menopause. We are going to take a look at each pose and try to decipher why the pose might “cure” you of an ailment. For example, Fish pose is said to cure anxiety and stress. Well, on a practical note, this pose releases the tension in your neck, thereby reducing your anxiety and stress—that makes sense, right? If you’re familiar with the TV show *Dragnet* from the 1950s and 1960s, you’ll remember that the lead character, Sergeant Joe Friday, used to say, “Just the facts, Ma’am, just the facts.” That’s what I’m going to give you. Just the facts.

What Is Sanskrit, What Is Yoga, and What Can It Do for Me?

Sanskrit is the Indo-Aryan language of Hinduism. A lot of yoga is still taught by using the Hindu language instead of English. Someone who is new to yoga may find it difficult to understand what the teacher is saying.

The yoga poses (also known as Asanas) in this book are broken down by body parts and muscle groups. Most yoga poses work numerous areas of your body. Let’s say you are in the chest chapter and you are doing Downward-Facing Dog—this pose not only opens your chest but also helps stretch the back of your legs and strengthen your arms. Some sections in this book are going to be harder than others. Just as in

the Olympics, I'm going to rate the "level of difficulty" for each pose, with 10 being the hardest. That way, if you are having a hard time doing a pose, you'll know that you are not alone.

Yoga is a full-body workout not only from head to toe but also from your inside to your outside. By that I mean that the poses in yoga not only work your muscles and joints but also affect your internal organs and nervous system. Yoga helps calm your nervous system by reducing the tension caused by stress. According to a 2005 study from Yale University School of Medicine, people who practice yoga at least three times a week may reduce their blood pressure, pulse, and risk for heart disease. Moreover, yoga improves heart health in both healthy individuals and those with diagnosed heart disease, says Satish Sivasankaran, MD, who conducted the study while training at Yale.

One of the main benefits I find from doing yoga is that it gives you more energy. You get so much more accomplished in a shorter period of time—who wouldn't want a little more energy to help you get through the day? I'm not going to ask you to spend hours upon hours a day doing yoga, because a little bit goes a long way. As I mentioned earlier, even doing just 10 minutes of yoga a few times a week will make a big difference. Your energy level will go up and your stress level will go down. If you have always been athletic but have been intimidated by yoga, even if it meant developing or maintaining flexibility, I get it. As a competitive athlete myself, I couldn't understand how the waif-like people in my yoga class could be so much better at it than me. I think that was the hardest part for me. I had to take the "competition" out of doing yoga. With yoga, you have to check your ego at the door. Don't expect to twist yourself into a pretzel the first time you try yoga. I've been practicing for nearly three decades, and there are still a lot of poses I continue to work on. That's the great thing about yoga—you will always be learning something new and challenging your body in new ways.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find quick yoga workout routines for a specific part of your body. You'll find workouts for your head, neck, shoulders, upper back, chest, arms, hands and wrists, core, lower back, hips, legs, knees, and feet and ankles. Don't worry, I will break down the poses so you know how to safely enter and exit each one. And as I mentioned earlier, you'll find modifications for each pose. I present an easier version and a harder version of the poses because some poses may be easy for you and some may not.

What If I Have an Injury?

Should you do yoga if you have an injury? Well, one of the main benefits of yoga is injury prevention. However, if you already have an injury, the first thing you should do is ask your doctor if it's okay to practice yoga. How do you recognize if you have an injury? If you are like most athletes, I'm willing to bet you ignore signs of injuries and write them off as soreness that will eventually go away. Pay attention! If you have any joint pain—that means pain in your knees, ankles, elbows, or wrists—or swelling, you need to be honest with yourself that these are signs of an injury. Before I start my yoga classes, I always ask about injuries (good instructors always do that). The first thing I check for is swelling in the area; if there is swelling, then I suggest that the student take the day off and see a doctor. Numbness in your body might be a sign of a pinched nerve; go see a chiropractor. You can bring this book with you to your physician and show him or her what you are planning on doing.

Here are some ideas on how to work other parts of your body while the injured area is recovering. Don't do any poses that directly affect the injured area. Let's say you tweaked your knee. You would want to skip the “yoga for the knee” chapter, but you can still focus on other areas of your body, like your arms, core, or upper back. So while your knee recovers, you could work on getting a “six-pack” or “yoga arms.” In this situation you would do what are called “floor poses,” as opposed to “standing poses” that work on your leg muscles and your knees. “No pain, no gain” does not apply in yoga—if it hurts, don't do it!

When it comes to injuries, my goal is to prevent you from getting injured in the first place. One of the main reasons yoga can help prevent injuries is its ability to prevent imbalances in your body caused by tight muscles. It's one of the few exercises that uses one side of your body independently of the other. In most workouts, the body will just compensate for the muscle imbalances. In each chapter, I will tell you “how the body part works.” For instance, in Chapter 11, Legs, I discuss the anatomy of the legs so you can understand how the muscles of your legs work. Let me give you an example. When your quadriceps, the big muscles in the front of your thigh, are stronger than the hamstrings, the muscle in the back of your leg, a hamstring pull

can result. This happens to a lot of runners—myself included, before I started practicing yoga.

Yoga versus Stretching

I'm often asked, "What is the difference between yoga and stretching?" Well, depending on how you "stretch," there may be no difference. In fact, in my "Yoga for Runners" workshops, I often hear someone say, "I already do that. I didn't know I was doing yoga." Most of the movements that we use when we are stretching come from yoga poses. But when you think of stretching, most of the time it's jerky, with a fast and forced movement, right? But when you think of yoga, you think of slow and controlled movements. I'm sure you have all seen runners grab an ankle and jerk their leg back and bounce it up and down. When I see that, I want to tackle the person and say, "Please stop! You are going to hurt yourself!" But I guess the tackling probably wouldn't go over very well, would it?

Unfortunately, most of the time when people stretch, they are trying to force their body to do something it's not ready to do. Yoga involves a lot more body awareness and attention to alignment. You *never* want to force yourself into a yoga pose. Athletes need to be especially careful to avoid this tendency since they, in general, are competitive, wanting to touch their toes *now*. Make sure you are warmed up before you do yoga or stretch.

What's the Mind-Body Connection About?

Yoga also has a mind-body connection, which I talk about in Chapter 1. This isn't normally part of stretching. The constant focus on the breath and the development of breath awareness gives you greater body control, which is necessary in all sports. The use of your breath in yoga will enhance your ability to carry oxygen to your muscles when you participate in sports. This translates into quicker reactions to unexpected situations encountered in running. For example, you might be chased by a pit bull or accidentally step into a pothole; unfortunately, I've experienced both. The breath work

you do in yoga is the main reason for the “yoga bliss” (Chapter 1), that great feeling you get after a yoga class. After his first class, one of the guys in my class said, “Oh my God, this is like heroin. Yoga is my new fix.” I have to say the comment threw me off for a second, but I think I get what he was trying to say. I hear similar comments from yoga novices. The feeling yoga inspires can be pretty great.

You Want Me to Stretch What?

Each chapter will go into some “anatomy.” I’m not going to get too technical, and I don’t want to bore you to death, but I feel it is always good to know some anatomy for any workout, whether it’s yoga or any other sports activity. Yoga is all about “body

awareness,” but to know your body, you need to know how it works. When I am talking about “flexibility” in an area of your body, I am referring to what is called “range of motion,” or how far you can bend that body part. Tight or stiff muscles can limit your range of motion. For example, my neck is stiff from writing, and that makes it hard for me to look over my shoulder right now. When it comes to anatomy in this book, I focus mostly on your muscles—when you are dealing with flexibility, you have little or no control over your bones, joints, ligaments, and tendons. We all know what bones are and what they do, but you might not know that ligaments connect our bones to each other and stabilize our joints; our muscles are connected to our bones by tendons.

As I mentioned earlier, the end of

QUICK-FIX TIPS

Similar to most workout routines, you want to do yoga on an empty stomach, or at least not right after you just had a big meal.

Some of the workouts in this book are harder than others, so each chapter will give you easier options and modifications for the poses.

It’s always best to be warmed up first, so you can do the yoga workout routine after you run or work out at the gym. Personally, I like to take a hot bath before I do yoga at home.

Each yoga workout routine will start and end the same way. We will start with some breath work and end with an easy Spinal Twist pose and Corpse pose (also known as the Resting pose).

Remember: “No pain, no gain” does *not* apply to yoga.

If you have any injuries or other health issues, check with your doctor first to see if it’s okay to do yoga.

each chapter features yoga for a body part workout routine. Each short workout will start with some breath work and end with the Corpse pose. Why? Well, I've already told you why breath work is so important, and Corpse is one of the most important poses in yoga. It seems so simple—as the name implies, you are just lying there. But if you are a type A personality, this may actually turn out to be one of your biggest challenges. You don't want to skip the Corpse pose, because it helps you to completely relax your body and your mind.

Okay, it's time to get started. You can start with the head and work your way down to the feet, or you may want to pick a specific part of your body, like your hips. Either way is good!