

Yoga Videos Aren't All Equal at Getting Out the Kinks

Yoga used to be the kind of thing someone's eccentric aunt did - a woman with a braid wrapped around her head who entertained the children by putting her foot behind her neck.

I tried screening three different videos on a day when my neck and shoulder muscles were tighter than last year's jeans. I had knots the size of Rhode Island that had been there for weeks.

Jane Fonda's Yoga Exercise (A.Vision) relaxed them. Kathy Smith's New Yoga (BodyVision) warmed them up. Three hours later, after falling under the reassuring southern spell of actress Dixie Carter's Unworkout (MCA Universal), they melted away.

Here's how it went:

An all-natural Jane Fonda appeared on a set that looks like a craggy moonscape, wearing plain red leotards and tights, and sporting a French braid down to her hips. (It's a hair extension, but what do we care.)

She demonstrated the classical Sun Salutation, a choreographed yoga routine traditionally used to greet the day, her huge Ted Turner diamond gleaming in the spotlight.

Then she asked us to join her in a warm-up, several rounds of the Sun Salutation, and a relaxation and breath awareness segment, 60 minutes all told.

Yoga is slow, I decided, slow enough that I have time to examine the webs between my toes and the lint on the carpet while holding each pose. While nearly standing on my head, I meditated on the most profound of Jane's statements: When in doubt, breathe.

After the relaxation segment, my thoughts switched to her final message: I am relaxed, and I will carry this feeling with me.

She said this hour would help me stretch, tone and energize my body. At that moment I felt lethargic, noodled, ready for lunch. The knots are still there.

Kathy Smith also appeared in a red leotard and tights and urged me to do the workout on an empty stomach, preferably just before dinner. She worked with Rod Stryker, yoga instructor of the stars, to update the ancient disciplines and merge them into a workout for fitness fans.

Kathy stood on a raised pylon as she led a more athletic version of the Sun Salutation, a half dozen other poses and a meditation, 60 minutes total.

The great thing about yoga, I'm learning, is the great names attached to each exercise: the downward dog, the cobra, the plank.