



CEDARS-SINAI MEDICAL CENTER.

**NEWS**

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### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

An innovative program at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles is drawing physicians from around the world to study and observe the clinical documentation of yoga's medical benefits as evidenced by patients enrolled in its decade-old hatha yoga cardiac program. Recently, in recognition of its leadership in this discipline, Cedars-Sinai was named as an associated entity of the United Council on Yoga, which is partnering with the President's Challenge, the physical activity and fitness awards program of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

### **YOGA GAINS MEDICAL ENDORSEMENT AS AN EFFECTIVE THERAPY FOR STRESS REDUCTION IN CORONARY PATIENTS**

**LOS ANGELES, CA (March 15, 2004)** – Well into his second career as a filmmaker, Gary Bart was doing what he'd wanted to do for a long time. He was working on a movie about his great-uncle, titled "The Invincible," which film critic Roger Ebert named one of the best films of 2002. So it was very surprising – in fact devastating – Bart says, when he was told by his doctor three years ago that he had cardiomyopathy, a chronic condition characterized by a weakening of the heart muscle. Learning that his heart was only pumping blood at 40 percent capacity and his condition wouldn't improve, Bart went from enjoying life into a deep depression, feeling like he'd received a death sentence.

His doctor prescribed medication and told him that he needed to do everything he could to reduce stress in his life. He started practicing meditation (which he hadn't done for over 30 years), and enrolled in the hatha yoga cardiac program at Cedar's Sinai Medical Center. Today, Bart describes himself as someone with an uplifting and optimistic attitude about the future and his friends say they can see in his face that he's more relaxed. He credits these positive feelings in large part to his participation in Cedars Sinai's program. He's reduced his stress and hasn't experienced any further damage to his heart since enrolling in the program.

According to C. Noel Bairey Merz, M.D., Holder of the Women's Guild Chair in Women's Health, Director of the Preventive and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center, and Medical Director of Women's Health at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, yoga is one of the leading preventive health measures in the area of stress reduction, health and well-being.

"Recognizing the detrimental effects of stress on individuals, especially in the area of heart disease, we began implementing yoga therapy and offering it to our patients more than 10 years ago," she explains. "Over the years it has become one of our primary therapies for stress management, and is definitely a complement to our approach to medical care."

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Cedars-Sinai's Hatha Yoga Cardiac Program utilizes Integral Yoga©, which is a style of Hatha Yoga, a traditional, gentle form shown to be effective as one of the main therapies for stress management, particularly among patients diagnosed with coronary disease. Classes are held for one hour on two mornings each week and are taught by Nirmala Heriza, B.A., a nationally recognized certified Integral Yoga© instructor, who is a cardiac yoga therapist at Cedars-Sinai and president of the Integral Yoga Center of Los Angeles.

"A lot of people are new to yoga and are confused about the different methods. Some forms are very athletic, and photos in magazines, showing people's bodies twisted into certain poses, can be intimidating. Our class is based on Integral Yoga© – medically proven to be one of the safest styles of yoga," says Heriza.

Because the class size is small – usually seven students – Heriza is able to give each student personal attention. The classes are designed specifically for cardiac patients, but are open to anyone; a physician's referral isn't necessary. Participants range in age from their 30's to their 80's.

"This is the first class of its kind with the endorsement of a major hospital and takes a very critical, in-depth look at the medical benefits of yoga," Heriza explains. "Doctors are coming from around the world to observe the class and study the clinical documentation compiled by Cedars-Sinai's Preventive and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center. Physicians want to know how yoga is benefiting their patients ... that it's not just an exercise."

"Various research studies have shown that the breathing and relaxation techniques taught in yoga can reduce stress, decrease blood pressure, minimize the symptoms of angina (chest pain), and increase the capacity to exercise," says Dr. Bairey Merz. High blood pressure, obesity, and lack of exercise are among the contributing causes of heart disease.

Heriza, who is the author of an upcoming book on the topic, Dr. Yoga, which will be released by Penguin/Tarcher Books in August, is also president of the United Council of Yoga, an umbrella yoga organization, which is partnering with the President's Challenge, the physical activity and fitness awards program of the Presidents Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (PCPFS). Yoga participants at Cedars-Sinai can track their physical activities, including yoga, on an interactive Web site ([www.presidentschallenge.org](http://www.presidentschallenge.org)) and are eligible to earn a Presidential Active Lifestyle Award (PALA) for being active 30 minutes a day, five days a week for six weeks.

"I do yoga myself and know from personal experience its power to reduce stress, build strength and increase flexibility," said PCPFS executive director Melissa Johnson, a native of Newport Beach.

Cedars-Sinai was recently named an associated entity of the United Council on Yoga and is the only medical center with membership on the Council. Two physicians from Cedars-Sinai's Preventive and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center, Donna Polk, M.D., and Dr. Bairey Merz, along with Richard Gordon, program director, are members of the Council's governing board.

For more information about the Cardiac Hatha Yoga Program at Cedars-Sinai, contact the Preventive and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center at (310) 452-5815.

Cedars-Sinai is one of the largest nonprofit academic medical centers in the Western United States. For the fifth straight two-year period, it has been named Southern California's gold standard in health care in an independent survey. It is internationally renowned for its diagnostic and treatment capabilities and its broad spectrum of programs and services, as well as breakthroughs in biomedical research and superlative medical education. It ranks among the top 10 non-university hospitals in the nation for its research activities.