



Macho men muscle in on the yoga mat

Sarah Whyte

IT WAS once seen as an alternative pastime for hippies, but yoga has taken on a decidedly more macho bent. In the past five years, yoga instructors say they have seen a significant increase in men joining the once female-dominated Lycra-clad force.

Men are wanting to increase their flexibility and core strength, say the instructors, taking up stronger styles of yoga such as Ashtanga, Bikram and Power Yoga.

Leigh Blashki, the director of the Australian Institute of Yoga Therapy, said men appeared more comfortable attending yoga sessions. "Men are preparing to explore a greater variety of styles, with a 10 per cent increase in men joining yoga [classes] in the past five years," said Mr Blashki, who is also the vice-director Yoga Australia.

The owner of Bikram Yoga in Brookvale, Jodie Petersen, said men who joined her classes were often

surprised by the number of other men doing Bikram. She has seen a 10 per cent increase in men in heated classes, which have more than 1000 students a week.

"We have 40 per cent men in our studios," Ms Petersen said. "I have seen an increase over the past five years of men from all ages, from teens to men in their 60s and 70s."

A former paratrooper, Duncan Peak, who runs the Power Living yoga studios, said "a lot more men [are] starting to get into it".

A younger generation of men who surf or want leaner physiques appear to be the latest demographic to embrace yoga. In his more difficult classes, Mr Peak said that up to half his class of 60 could be men.

"They're a culture growing up that accepts yoga." One of his clients, *The Biggest Loser* trainer Shannon Ponton, 37, said he had started doing yoga a year ago to enhance his once gym-heavy fitness regime. "It has been broken down, away from

wearing linen pants and having a dot on your forehead," he said. "Now all the guys just wear boardshorts."

Rob Sabato, a 33-year-old landscape architect from Manly, said his personal trainer suggested he start yoga a year ago.

"I tried the normal style and was surrounded by middle-aged women," he said. "Now, there is a few of us."

Mary Shellens, a committee member of the International Yoga Teacher Association, which was set up in 1967, said she had witnessed a shift in how people perceive yoga.

"People thought it was an odd or weird activity that you had to go to India [for], or you were a hippie," she said. "But now, you certainly wouldn't think they were hippies."

Football clubs are also getting in on the act. The Sea Eagles and Roosters do yoga to improve flexibility and post-game recovery.

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All the guys just wear boardshorts

Shannon Ponton,
The Biggest Loser trainer



Adopting the pose ... guys in boardshorts line up next to the girls at a yoga class in Manly. Photo: James Brickwood