

# YogaCore® Training

## Work Your Physical and Mental Core

By Carol Ann Weber

It would seem "core training" actually dates back to the earliest yoga practices in that most yoga postures cannot be accomplished without utilizing your core muscles (i.e., abs, glutes, pelvic floor muscles, adductors and abductors). It has been said that because both yoga practitioners and dancers seem to have stronger core muscles, their bodies retain their youthful appearance and functionality far beyond most folks, even those who practice other forms of exercise.

Beth Shaw, the founder of YogaFit® training systems, a yoga-centered training company based in Southern California, has developed a "YogaCore™" workout that focuses on the essential core muscles. "I think most people don't realize the importance of core-centered strength and stability in their yoga practice," says Beth. "Once they get that down, their practice becomes much more enhanced."

Originally from New York City, Ms. Shaw moved to Southern California in 1989 and started practicing traditional styles of yoga. "When I set out to teach yoga in the health clubs in 1993, I found the traditional training didn't prepare me for the health club environment," she shares. So, she decided to create a form of yoga training that would be helpful to health club participants. In YogaFit® she found a style that worked and which has since led to many spin-offs, like YogaButt, YogaFit for Seniors, YogaKids and YogaCore.

Beth incorporates into the YogaCore® workout the "core ball," a small ball you hold between your legs about three to four inches above the knee, which she says causes you to automatically engage the core muscles while performing various yoga postures, as well as keeping your hips and legs properly aligned. "The ball is helpful because it creates more core-centered awareness, strength and engagement of

the muscles," Shaw explains. "It also makes you focus more, because you don't want to drop the ball. And it's fun."

Essential to every yoga practice, including Ms. Shaw's, is the use of deep breathing, which, when done properly, originates from the core. Beth describes a very significant benefit of core breathing, which is supported by the latest research discussed in Dr. Michael D. Gershon's book, *The Second Brain: A Groundbreaking New Understanding of Nervous Disorders of the Stomach and Intestine* (HarperCollins, 1998). "When you focus the yoga breath into the mid-section, you create a lot of awareness, not only on the physical plane, but you tap into what's known as 'the second brain' of the body... What [Dr. Gershon] found is that the same cells that are in your brain are present in your stomach lining, which is why people get a feeling in the pit of their stomach, for example. It's a very intuitive center. The problem is that most people are junking it up with too much bad food and not enough awareness."

When you work the core muscles, says Shaw, you are not just working the physical, but stimulating and strengthening the body's second brain. The third chakra, which is an energy center that corresponds to the core, is considered to be the willpower center. (Note: the words associated with the third chakra are "I can.") "If you can harness the energy from your lower chakras and raise them above the mid-section by channeling that energy upward toward the heart and the throat, you are working on the spiritual component as well as the physical. And you are strengthening your willpower."

The purpose of any yoga practice is to create that balance between the physical, mental and spiritual, which all starts in the core. And training such as YogaCore® certainly achieves that goal.