

'I beat chronic fatigue syndrome with yoga'



Fiona Agombar, 55, from Southsea, took up yoga to combat her exhaustion.

'I was running my own publicity company, working long hours and living on junk food, when I first fell ill. I'd lie awake at night, worrying about my debts, but I didn't think of slowing down. Instead I worked even harder and, when I got the flu, I took three days off thinking that the exhaustion would disappear, but it didn't. My GP diagnosed glandular fever and told me that the only treatment was rest.

I knew I needed a change so I decided to sell the business and started a new career as a TV researcher. I loved it, but juggling the sale with a demanding new job piled on the pressure. I felt so worn out I'd creep off to lie down in my lunch hour and was often too exhausted to speak. Once, my husband found me on the floor at home, unable to get up. Just 18 months later I was in a wheelchair, suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS).

Treatment for CFS has improved, but this was in the 1990s when people still thought of it as 'yuppie flu' and I was sent to a psychiatric unit. It was totally inappropriate, but I'll never regret it because a wonderful therapist introduced me to meditation. I began to see that life was about being, not doing, and that I could find a quieter, more authentic me.

When I came home, I decided to take up yoga with Angela Stevens, who teaches yoga for health. She suggested setting up a class for people like me, focusing on gentle stretches, meditation and yoga breathing. Like many people with CFS I was breathing too fast, which made me agitated and panicky. Slowing my breathing helped relax my body and calm my mind and I began to feel stronger.

Three years later, I started to train as a yoga teacher and wrote a book, *Beat Fatigue With Yoga*, to pass on what I had learned. Soon afterwards, I decided to backpack round India and learn more. I couldn't believe that I was trekking in the Himalayas when a few years before I'd been unable to move! I now run yoga retreats in England and India and feel fitter than ever. Living the way that's right for me has given me back my health.'

DIFFERENT IDEAS

Trials show that yoga-therapy practices are among the most effective for stress-related conditions, says the NHS Directory of Complementary and Alternative Practitioners. These include asthma, hypertension, arthritis, IBS, diabetes, migraine and MS, along with chronic fatigue. The NHS recommends cognitive behavioural therapy and progressive exercise for CFS, but you can also eat to beat fatigue. Natural energy boosters include beetroot, the herbs astragalus, ginseng and rhodiola, and supplements of vitamin B, magnesium and co-enzyme Q10.