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New weapon in the war on wrinkles: facial yoga

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Proponent says facial yoga can strengthen, improve tone, diminish wrinkles
- One program on DVD offers more than 30 different exercises
- Plastic surgeon: Jury out on benefits, but it's probably not harmful

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By Linda Saether
CNN

TEXT SIZE

ATLANTA, Georgia (CNN) -- I am surprised that women are technically still not allowed to take part in direct combat; in my opinion nobody knows how to fight better. Sure, we might be missing some of the brawn, but I think we more than make up for it with two equally essential war-fighting attributes: patience and pain tolerance.



The theory of facial yoga is that you can tone your facial muscles just as you can your abs or arms.

And for anyone out there questioning that, let me just say two things: hair highlighting and bikini waxing.

The look of those ready to do battle is unmistakable: The combat-ready clothing, the steely gaze, the tight-lipped concentration.

I saw all of that in a small group of women gathered one Saturday in a small, spartan room in Marietta, Georgia, a city outside Atlanta, as they were quietly coached in the best methods for fighting the good fight.

"Take a deep breath," their instructor intoned, "then say BLAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH."

And with that, the guy in the front of the room, grabbed his forehead, stuck his tongue out and rolled his eyes back into his head.

What is this? Combat tactics of the crazed and dangerous?

Nope.

It's the newest trend in the fight against the signs of aging. This latest weapon is facial yoga, Happy Face Yoga to be precise. It was created by Gary Sikorski, a man of 50 who looks a lot less, who said he just got "tired of looking gray and old."

Don't let the yoga part of this confuse you; there is no gentle downward dog pose or sturdy warrior stance here. No, here there is fierce fighting going on and no parts of these female faces are left untouched.

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Tongues are stuck up and out, eyes are rolled back, eyelids are fluttered, mouths are opened and shut in silent screams or gummed in mock "Grandma without her teeth in" motions, necks are self-throttled, noses are pushed up and back and cheeks are prodded and probed.

And throughout these facial maneuverings, Sikorski barks encouragement: "BREATHE," "RELAX," "LIFT AND RELEASE" "FEEL THE BURN!"

At least I think those were encouragements.

The group of 12 or so, ranging in age from teens to 60-somethings, were put through a series of 18 facial toning exercises.

These, according to Sikorski, "strengthen and tone all 57 muscles of the face, neck and scalp. When you start to tone the muscles," he explained, "it starts to move them back to their regular position. As you strengthen them, you start to see things like the muscles of your cheeks being lifted, your nose lifting up, your eyes becoming wider, your mouth corners turning up, fine lines become smooth."

The idea behind the facial toning movement in general and Happy Face Yoga in particular is that much as working out tones muscles in your body, the same applies to the muscles of your face.

Hmmmm does that mean my cheeks could sprout a six-pack? Or my forehead could become "cut?"

I am not sure I really want that.

But if you look at Sikorski who has been doing these facial maneuvers daily for several years, well, he looks great.

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So if I can have that, I'm in!

The Happy Face Yoga program includes more than 30 exercises and is available on DVD to be done in the privacy of your home. (And that's a good thing; if you did these in public, you might stop traffic!) The idea is that individuals will want to tailor the facial workouts to target the areas that need improvement, "just like a gym routine," Sikorski said. "You want to design your own personal facial routine and do maybe eight to 10 exercises daily that you see fit your needs."

Sikorski touts his program as an alternative for those who "don't want to undergo the dangers of surgery or can't afford the cost of an operation."

At least one plastic surgeon we talked to wasn't adamantly anti-facial toning, but she wasn't sold either.

"The jury is still out on the benefits" of these type of exercises, said board-certified plastic surgeon Heidi Regenass.

Because no scientific studies have been conducted on these programs, it's hard to know with certainty what they can and can't do, she said.

Inside the cosmetic surgery community there are "two different schools of thought," she said, about the best way to minimize lines.

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"One side is very big on stimulation for toning and smoothing out lines," she said. "That is why lasers work."

The other side, she said, "believes keeping those muscles relaxed is the way to go, for example with injectables that relax the muscles like Botox."

The right treatment also depends on just what kind of wrinkle it is, how it was formed and where exactly it sits on our faces, she said.

So there is no easy answer when it comes to the line issue.

"I don't think it is going to do any damage," she said of facial toning. "And it could well do some good like for tightening jowls and chins." Just be careful not to overwork the delicate skin around the eyes and the forehead, she said.

But what about those warrior women twisting their faces to the calls of Sikorski's anti-aging battle cries? Well, after a few hours they were still at it.

Young and old alike, they remained focused, concentrating on putting up the good fight, staving off wrinkles of the future or trying to lessen those from the past.



In the end, Happy Face Yoga practitioners may get 1) a mixed bag of anti-aging weapons; 2) an interesting way to make babies cry; 3) a chance to make a few new friends; or 4) the chance to have a really good laugh at themselves and their vanity.

And having that last laugh might just be the best weapon in winning the war that time just doesn't seem to want to let us forget -- the one called aging. [E-mail to a friend](#)

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