

# Suburban LIFESTYLES

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## Yoga—just what the doctor ordered

Physician Kalpana Rajdev  
raises money for the  
Isha Yoga Foundation in  
pole-sitting contest

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## Isha Yoga—it's what this doctor orders

by Audry Bartholomew

When most people think of yoga they think of bodily contortions, maybe humming. In the worst case scenario, they might think of Rodney Yee—that ubiquitous presence in national pharmacy chains whose digitally enhanced tan and groin (so precariously suspended in spandex shorts) too often stun the unsuspecting shopper.

Isha Yoga has very little to do with all that. It is “not a belief system or philosophy, but a system of simple seated postures, dynamic breathing techniques and meditation that has helped thousands improve their mental clarity, concentration and emotional well-being.”



Farmington resident Kalpana Rajdev, a 54-year-old physician with Henry Ford Hospital and devoted member of the Isha Yoga Foundation, is hoping to save lives with it.

Just recently, she made the attempt from the top of a six-foot eight-inch pole, where she sat on a seat 12 inches in diameter for over 17 hours. She had no backrest and no cushion to support her—only a footrest just big enough for one foot at a time. When she climbed on it, she said she felt the ground moving beneath her. She weathered the cold and wind, and later the mid-day sun. But she didn't come down until she was sure she had won the Dearborn Oktoberfest's annual pole-sitting contest.

As for the pole, well, it might as well have been called a soap box, because the then nine-and-something-foot-tall Dr. Rajdev used it to promote her platform among festival-goers.

“I came with my family to tell people about the benefits of Isha Yoga, and I'm afraid they had no choice but to hear us. We were situated in the middle of a chili cook-off,” Rajdev says. “But it was nice. We raised more than \$700 total from the event, and also raised awareness about the Isha Yoga Foundation's humanitarian efforts around the world.”

Rajdev is a healer—in the traditional and nontraditional senses of the word. She has practiced medicine for 30 years. She is a provider of hospice care, and as medical director for two nursing homes, is responsible for more than 80

patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week. But since adopting the practice of Isha Yoga four years ago, her views on the western medical paradigm have changed radically—a transformation that is rooted in the complete physical transformation she experienced through yoga. She thinks doctors should prescribe meditation over medication in many instances.

“When my husband and I first took the yoga class, I realized how such simple practices can have such a great impact on the body. I was sleeping better, so I got so much more done at work. My husband's blood pressure dropped significantly. I was shocked by this,” she said. “And then when I saw so many patients with so many problems I thought, ‘Why are we only medicating them?’ We were treating them in these miniscule ways, while there is this thing out there that can change their whole lives.”

“Don't misunderstand me, I think modern medicine has a place,” Rajdev continues. “But it should be used wisely and only when it's needed. And the majority of the time, we don't need it. The average person can maintain their health without it. As physicians and patients, we aren't using a common sense approach to health. We have lost the sense. We rely too much on traditional medicine. And it's funny that we have this trust in medicine, since most of the time, we are disappointed by its results.”

While the fundamentals of

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cover

Isha Yoga—meditation and controlled breathing—have been endorsed by certain members of the medical community for the treatment of all manner of disease, including fatigue, malaise, obesity and high blood pressure, it has not been emphasized enough, Rajdev argues, as a treatment option. There is no “proof” from a double-blind controlled clinical study that yoga works. And there is no proof, says Rajdev, because there is no profit to be turned.

“Who is going to fund a clinical trial? There is more money to be made by marketing pharmaceuticals. Besides—balance, peace of mind and awareness are pretty hard to measure in a lab,” she says.

Proof or no proof, yoga does work—at least for this doctor, who hasn’t missed a single practice in four years. She spends 25 minutes each morning and 15 minutes each afternoon meditating. People around her often remark that they have little time for such indulgences. But she has little

tolerance for this claim. She has more time to work, and even, more time to play.

“Fifteen minutes of meditation is equal to two-three hours of sleep. It’s that restorative. I do not do less because I do yoga. I have not learned to reject the material

non-stop.”

“Non-stop” is the only way to describe Dr. Kalpana Rajdev. She sat effortlessly, even evangelically, for all 17 hours of the event—unlike other contestants who were restless and complained of bruises and back pain. She danced while

seated on her pole. She practiced her pranayama, her breathing. She smiled, waved, and as her daughter said, “she was amazing—calm, balanced, always energetic.”

Kalpana said the pole-sitting was something of a test for her. It challenged her strength and all she had learned through yoga.

“I wasn’t even sure I could do it. But I thought, here I can show others they can do something they think is beyond their reach. I

think yoga gave me this inspiration. And I also felt compelled because of the challenge. If it was very easy it wouldn’t have been so exciting for me,” she said. “In the end I was amazed at my stamina and balance.”

Rajdev is now gearing up for the Isha Yoga Foundation’s next event on November 3, when the whole community will

not only get the chance to learn more about Isha Yoga, but experience it for themselves. Far from his home in southern India, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, recognized as one of the most profound yoga masters alive today, will return to Detroit to teach a seven-day Isha Yoga

course.

Though Rajdev says her accomplishments in promoting Isha Yoga are small in comparison to the touring yogi, one thing is clear. She, now in her second childhood, is learning to find bliss, and she’s getting others to find theirs as well.

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**what:** The Isha Yoga Program is a system of simple seated postures, dynamic breathing techniques and Shoonya meditation (a process of conscious non-doing) that has helped thousands find relief from chronic physical ailments as well as improve their mental clarity, concentration and emotional well-being. **how:** Yoga master Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev will teach a seven-day intensive Isha Yoga course. **when and where:** November 3-9, weeknights from 6:15-9:30 p.m. and from 8 a.m.-7 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday at the Greenfield Manor in Dearborn. For more information, call ( 2 4 8 ) 4 7 8 - 4 7 8 6 or visit [www.ishafoundation.org](http://www.ishafoundation.org)

world, but to become more in-tune with it. I just got a mountain bike, and at 50 I am having my second childhood. My energy is greater, my productivity has increased. So even though I am doing meditation, no one is missing me. I am outdoing my staff. They take many, many breaks and come back feeling worse. Once I take my 15 minutes, I am

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