

the
Yoga Journal

makeovers

Meet three yoga neophytes



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEBRA McCLINTON

STYLIST: LYN HEINEKEN; GROOMING: SHAWN BURKE; EDITH'S TOP: LULULEMON; SHORTS: STONEWEAR DESIGNS; LEAH'S OUTFIT: STONEWEAR DESIGNS

part I We're often asked by people skeptical of yoga, "Can it *really* help me [lose weight, get fit, heal an injury]?" Of course, we always say yoga can do all that and more. So we decided to put our money where our mouth is and give three novices a yoga makeover. No, we won't be putting them in the best booty-boosting yoga pants or applying the newest to-die-for vegan mineral makeup. We're talking about a soul-transforming makeover: one that will introduce the participants to yoga while

It didn't take us long to come up with the right teacher, Jason Crandell. He's assisted Rodney Yee for years; he teaches at yoga conferences and studios around the country; and he directs the yoga program at the San Francisco Bay Club, the city's premier athletic club, which boasts an 11,000-square-foot Mind & Body Center for yoga and Pilates. But impressive résumé aside, Jason Crandell has been one of our staff teachers for the past five years. He has managed our sometimes injured bodies and addled minds

and
their
coach

Jason

We enlisted the help of San Francisco Bay Club yoga director Jason Crandell to prescribe a personalized regimen for each. Will it change their lives? BY ANDREA FERRETTI

addressing an issue that's affecting their quality of life.

After putting out a call for volunteers, we found three brave souls who fit the bill. They are Leah Castella, a lawyer who wants to lose weight; Edith Chan, a triathlete who wants to prevent injuries and burnout; and Mark Webb, a lawyer with a knee injury.

We're mindful that these makeovers are not just in the service of "fixing" the participants. Sure, we want to help our yoga newbies reach their goals, but we're also wondering how the practice will transform their lives. Will it change Mark's relationship to pain or assuage Leah's body-image issues? Will it help Edith stay relaxed and present as she prepares for her first Ironman race? Is yoga truly transformative the way those of us who are already on board believe it is?

To ensure the best possible experience for our newbies, we needed to find a great teacher: someone who enjoys working with beginners and who can tailor a yoga practice to meet an individual's needs—someone confident, skillful, and nurturing. We also wanted someone gentle and encouraging but capable of dishing out tough love during those moments when a participant's commitment would inevitably wane.

with gentle aplomb, so we were certain he had the necessary skills. We also knew that his straightforward, no-nonsense approach was balanced by sensitivity and compassion for each student. Whether he's teaching a group of four or a packed conference room of 75, he has a gift for catering to the needs of each person without losing track of the big picture.

Crandell is particularly interested in working with yoga newcomers individually. "People express their needs more clearly and honestly in a one-on-one setting than they would in a public class," he says. "We'll be able to isolate variables and have a much more accurate sense of what's going on with them than we would in a public class." Crandell is even more eager to introduce Leah, Edith, and Mark to the practice of yoga. "I hope that this program touches them all in ways they wouldn't have foreseen," he says, "and that the yoga practice becomes a necessary part of their days, giving them time for quiet reflection and insight."

In six months, we'll report back to you on the progress that our three intrepid yoga tenderfoots have made. In the meantime, they will be blogging about their ups and downs weekly on our website. You can observe their evolution by visiting yogajournalblogs.com.



MARK'S TOP: NATURAL HIGH LIFESTYLE; SHORTS: BE PRESENT; JASON'S TOP: C9 BY CHAMPION; SHORTS: 72K

LEAH CASTELLA | 33 | Lawyer

GOALS

go from size 18 to size 14
lower blood pressure
feel more fit

WEEKLY PROGRAM

one private session
one public class
three 30- to 45-minute
home practices



JASON'S TOP: LULULEMON; SHORTS: 72K; LEAH'S OUTFIT: STONEWEAR DESIGNS; MAT: GAIAM; BLOCK: LULULEMON. PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY CLUB

Fresh Start Leah's Story

AS SHE LEANS IN to tell her story, hazel eyes wide, hands waving expressively, a laugh tumbling out at regular intervals, it's clear that Leah Castella has *a lot* of energy. "Energy has never really been a problem for me," she says. "I'm a bit of a frenetic person." This deep well of energy has led to success. During seven years of toiling late nights and weekends at a corporate law firm in San Francisco—a workload she downplays—she's also racked up an inspiring amount of volunteer work that focuses on teens. In addition to coaching a mock-trial team at a local high school, she's created a summer debate camp for young women, and she organizes a program that matches teens with lawyer mentors.

But when it comes to maintaining a healthy, balanced life, her energy is a drawback. For years she's struggled to maintain her weight, alternately embracing workouts and diet plans and then falling off the wagon. "I've never been a person who's good at moderation," she says. "So when I embrace a workout plan, I'm crazy about it, and then when I let it go, I *really* let it go." Two years ago, she trained for and completed a triathlon with some friends at work, but shortly after the race, her interest waned. Likewise, she's tried a plethora of diet plans—Atkins, the South Beach Diet, Weight Watchers—that have only left her confused and frustrated. "Let's see. Do I eat fewer carbs of just soup, or not eat after four o'clock or before six?" she quips. But at 33, she's getting serious. At a recent doctor's visit, Castella discovered that she has high blood pressure; if she doesn't lower it within a few months, she'll have to go on medication.

Castella is aware that losing weight and keeping it off will require more than a good workout—she needs to find a way to balance her high-octane personality. She's recently achieved that in her work life by leaving the stressful environment of corporate law and opting to work for a smaller firm that is more aligned with her values. She hopes yoga will help her fine-tune the rest of her life. "I'm interested in yoga because it integrates physical and mental health," she says. "I need to find something that balances me and teaches me to embrace moderation."

Perhaps best of all, Leah believes that yoga will help her enjoy her weight-loss endeavor. "I want to do something because I love it, not because I have to exercise out of obligation," she says. "Yoga empowers you to take care of yourself. It's a way of life instead of another obligation you have to fulfill because your doctors or society says you have to be thin."

CRANDELL'S PLAN

In the beginning of his sessions with Leah, Crandell will focus on standing poses to help wake up her entire body. "Standing poses are incredibly efficient," Crandell says. "They build strength and endurance, they invigorate the entire body evenly, and they're empowering." He adds that standing poses will teach Leah whole-body awareness and will also provide an important blueprint for alignment that she can apply to all of her poses as she progresses. Crandell plans to do vigorous work with Leah, teaching her the basics of Sun Salutations so that she can eventually go to vinyasa flow classes on her own.

FOOD FOCUS

In addition to weekly yoga sessions, Castella will have regular meetings with the director of nutrition at the San Francisco Bay Club, Janet McBride, R.D. Ironically, McBride often finds that she needs to encourage people to eat more frequently. "I don't eliminate anything at first. I encourage adding meals and adding more vegetables to each meal." After their initial meeting, McBride determined that this is what she'll focus on with Leah, who often forgets to eat or skips breakfast because her day is so hectic, and then overeats or craves high-fat foods later.

First and foremost, McBride will educate Leah about the physiological effects of the deprivation mentality. "When you skip a meal, your blood sugar drops, which leads to a surge of hunger, and you binge." To get Leah out of the deprivation cycle, McBride will help her create and maintain a schedule in which she eats every three to four hours. McBride will encourage Leah to become the caretaker of her body, creating a smooth, comfortable rhythm instead of eating whenever her schedule allows.

Leah will need to raise her awareness so that she can sense when she's hungry, McBride says. She adds, "Yoga will help Leah reconnect with her body and really feel it so she's better able to get in touch with her hunger throughout the day." McBride will add to that awareness practice while dealing with two of Leah's other weight-loss obstacles: her love of dinner parties and her dependence on eating out.

In the beginning, McBride will not ask Leah to eliminate those two aspects of her life; instead, she'll teach Leah how to scrutinize menus and choose the most healthful options. Leah will also rate her hunger on a scale of zero to five before she begins every meal. "The No. 1 thing is to check in with your physical hunger before you mindlessly start eating," McBride says. "If your hunger is at a four or five, then you'll need some strategies to get you through the night." Some tips include opting for water first and saving the wine to drink with your meal (to avoid a blood-sugar high and crash); staying away from the bread and butter and ordering a broth-based soup instead; and making sure half the plate is filled with vegetables. "The goal is to build confidence," McBride says. "Really, you can eat anything. It just depends on how much you eat and what's driving you to eat it."

No Pain, Big Gain Edith's Story

AFTER HER FIRST TRIATHLON nine years ago, Edith Chan was hooked. “I fell passionately in love with it,” she says. Chan’s enthusiasm snowballed, and despite the grueling 80-hour weeks she worked as a software engineer, she began traveling and competing twice a month, eventually racing for Team USA around the world and winning several national championships. Like so many other devotees of the sport, she pushed herself hard and obsessed over breaking her personal records and getting up on the podium after each race. Soon she began to lose sight of why she loved the sport in the first place—the camaraderie, the mix of athletic disciplines, and

the outdoors. Instead of resting and celebrating after a stellar race, Chan found herself overtraining, burning out, and then sinking low after a lackluster performance. “All the focus on going faster and winning more races started to take the fun away,” Chan says. “Deep down I knew there had to be a better way.”

That better way came in the form of Chinese medicine, which Chan began studying about five years ago. After learning that the fundamental principle of Chinese medicine is maintaining a balance between yin and yang, stress and recovery, work and rest, she began to apply the philosophy to her sport and training. “I

understand now just how much my athletic longevity and sports performance depend on a balanced approach to my training and lifestyle,” she says.

But old habits die hard. Although Chan has scaled back (this year she will do three races instead of 10 or 12), she will compete in two races over the course of this make-over—an Olympic-distance triathlon and a marathon—to prepare for a race that she’s never done before, an Ironman triathlon. To give an idea of scale: An Olympic-level triathlon takes under three hours, while an Ironman—a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride, and a 26.2-mile marathon run—takes a full day.

In preparing for this major race, Chan hopes that yoga will help her put into practice what she already knows. “My hope is that yoga will teach me to slow down and remove my competitive ego so that I can better pay attention to and respect early signs of overtraining, illness, or injury,” she says. Although there’s no guarantee that yoga will improve her running, biking, or swimming speeds, Chan believes it could contribute to a faster overall time in a long event like an Ironman. As she points out, “Every up and down, every injury an athlete experiences, is magnified tenfold in an Ironman.” Chan might improve the biomechanics of her swimming stroke by becoming more flexible or heal the lower back injury that flares up while she cycles. In an Ironman, these improvements could make a difference of hours, not just minutes. “And because fitness gains come from cycles of training and recovery, not recovering enough could have big consequences in any of the races I do.”

CRANDELL'S PLAN

Chan’s vigorous training schedule includes two days per week of swimming, two days of long runs, and a day each of interval running and interval spinning. Crandell’s task is to balance her desire for strong physical work by teaching her how to rest. “I want to provide stability after Edith’s intense workouts by refreshing and rejuvenating her body, nerves, and mind.” Chan will spend time in restorative poses like Viparita Karani (Legs-up-the-Wall Pose) for part of every session they have together.

His practice regimen for Chan will also regularly include standing poses and backbends to help reverse the contraction in her shoulders, abdomen, and spine that she has from the running and cycling. “Backbends will help balance that contraction and reduce tension in those areas,” Crandell says. “They will also help open up the diaphragm, lungs, and chest so that we can open up her breathing channels and apparatus.”

Crandell will focus in large part on opening the diaphragm and improving Chan’s lung capacity to see if that will increase her speed. He plans to spend half of every practice session with her doing basic pranayama, or breathing, techniques.

And finally, Chan will undergo “before and after” laboratory testing with Roberto Quintana, a professor of exercise physiology at the California State University at Sacramento. Quintana will perform a dynamic lung function test to measure how effectively Edith is able to inhale and exhale. He’ll also test Edith’s lactate threshold, which measures the point at which exercise switches from steady, sustainable aerobic mode to a nonsustainable anaerobic mode. Essentially, it will show whether yoga affects Edith’s endurance and ability to work more efficiently.

EDITH CHAN | 30 | Licensed acupuncturist

GOALS

prevent burnout from overtraining

improve lung capacity

improve dynamic lung function and lactate-threshold heart rate

be pain free in her lower back while cycling

WEEKLY PROGRAM

one private session with Crandell

one group class

two 45-minute home practices



TOP: LULULEMON; SHORTS: STONEWEAR DESIGNS; MAT: GAIAM. PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY CLUB

MARK WEBB | 59 | Trial lawyer in injury cases

GOALS

stop walking with a limp
reduce constant knee pain
improve the range of
motion in his knee

WEEKLY PROGRAM

one private session
with Crandell
three group classes
per week
four 20-minute home
practices



JASON'S TOP: MPG, SHORTS: 72K; MARK'S TOP: NATURAL HIGH LIFESTYLE; SHORTS: BE PRESENT; MAT: GAJAM. PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY CLUB

Heal Thyself

Mark's Story

FOUR YEARS AGO, Mark Webb, then 55 years old, went to his regular Bikram Yoga class. He did the whole routine and left the class pain free. But the next day his knee swelled dramatically. After it was drained several times, his doctor recommended surgery to repair the meniscus (the cartilaginous disk that acts as a shock absorber for the knee joint). Webb agreed, but as he came out of surgery, he received bad news—the meniscus wasn't just torn; it was completely worn down to the point where he barely had any left.

Webb was stunned. "The guy who was supposed to fix my meniscus told me, 'You don't have any meniscus.' It was absurd, like a Marx Brothers movie," he recalls. Completely disheartened, he even decided to forgo physical therapy. "I didn't really trust my doctor anymore," he says. "All I wanted to do was sulk."

Webb took up rowing at his gym and maintained his *zazen* meditation practice, but the aching in his knee was always there. For the first year, it hurt as he got out of the car. It still plagues him as he walks up and down stairs, and he no longer takes pleasure in long walks. Over the years, the pain has worn him down and affected his vitality. But it took a major disappointment in his work life for Webb to become aware of just how much pain he was in.

Here's the terrific irony in Webb's story: He's spent the past 25 years as a successful lawyer practicing injury law. He is intensely devoted to his work, often representing hurt cyclists, whom he sees as underdogs in a city filled with cars. But only after losing one of the biggest trials of his life did he realize that he had to start tending to

himself the way he attends to his clients. Webb had worked on the trial for a full year. Losing it brought great disappointment and financial loss, not to mention humiliation, since coverage of the case appeared in national newspapers.

In the aftermath, Webb spent a few months feeling depressed, until he became inspired to make a major life change. "I'm getting older, I don't feel vibrant and strong, and my knee is still a problem," he says. "My health isn't going to get bet-

ter unless something dramatic happens, and that's why I've decided to reenter the world of yoga." When asked what he hopes to gain from this program, Webb says he wants to stop being dominated by the pain and to increase his stamina and vitality. Being a longtime meditator, Webb hopes that the spiritual aspect of yoga will help him feel better, too. "When I first started sitting, it helped get me back to that sense of freshness in life again. I hope that yoga will help me feel that way, too."

CRANDELL'S PLAN

When Crandell met Webb for the first time, he immediately noticed that the lawyer walked with a slight limp. "He wasn't bearing much weight on his knee," Crandell says. "He also had a very limited range of motion and all sorts of discomfort." But Crandell also noticed another pressing issue: Webb vocalized a strong need for a substantial change in his life. Because of this, Crandell is creating a program that both addresses the knee pain and helps get the knee out of Webb's way so that he can develop a full, satisfying yoga practice. "His arms, torso, and core are fine, yet he's allowed them to go fairly dormant," Crandell says. "I want to work with the knee, but I want to give him a complete yoga practice so that he'll get the energy moving in his body and feel good."

Crandell will work with Webb by practicing standing poses to create more strength and mobility in the knee. He'll use a chair or table to help support his weight. Webb will also start out with seated chair twists, Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose) on a block, and a Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose) series with the bottom foot pressed against a wall and his toes pulled back. Crandell says that positioning the bottom leg this way will encourage Webb to press through the foot, thereby teaching him proper alignment. Webb will get a thorough extension through the bottom leg and will strengthen it without bearing the weight that a comparable standing pose would introduce.

Finally, Crandell will create short sequences for Webb to do at home so that he can learn to monitor the knee on his own. "If he notices inflammation, he can do Legs-up-the-Wall or take a few days off," Crandell says. "But I want him to take the time to go inside and keep his practice consistent, without overdoing it on the knee." ■

Andrea Ferretti is a senior editor at Yoga Journal. Read her personal story about coping with depression, "Feel Happier Than You Ever Thought Possible," online at yogajournal.com.