New York City teens. sports teams do it—and now elebrities do it, professional yoga is gaining popularity with

school, sports and active social lives. important for teenagers who are juggling stress, benefits that can be especially Yoga has long been credited with increasing focus and concentration while reducing

"They often come into the studio exhausted," says Shari Michez-Blatt, the founder and director of karma Kids Yoga, who has been to the starting teens since 2003. They usually need we more restorative work than younger children, so she starts her classes with at least 10 so she starts her classes with at least 10 so she starts her cl minutes of relaxation.

It's time that her students appreciate. "The best thin gabout yoga is all the stretching and relaxing," said 12-year-old Emily Allen, who added that she and her twin sister Katherine had been studying yoga at Karma Kids since

"Exercise is a form of stress-relief," Vilchez-Blatt said. "Our effort is for them to leave feeling good about themselves and feeling relaxed."

Jennifer Ford, a certified middle and high school teacher and yoga instructor, said that as a public school teacher working with at-risk teens, she started doing yoga with her students in the classroom. IN BASKETBALL, FOR EXAMPLE, **"YOU EITHER**

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meditation can help teens
shrug off the stresses of
commuting and make them more ready to t

She went on to co-found Bent on Learning, a non-profit organization that offers yoga instruction primarily in underserved public schools. "We want to provide yoga to kids who generally may never even hear the word who generally may never even hear the word present the second face the day.

who generally ma 'yoga,'" she said.

Bent on Learning, now in its ninth year, used yoga to help children in downtown schools manage post-traumatic stress after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

"The most important thing for teens is to slow down," Ford said. She tells students to "just try to let everything go, don't worry about where you came from, where you're going after this."

Zamula started a program this year where teachers do a small amount of yoga with their students before and after test-preparation. She hopes this sense of routine will help the students on test days.

"If you don't have those proper channels to get rid of your nervous energy, you won't do as well," she said.

Arlen Zamula, the physical activities lisison for Healthy Schools Healthy Smiles, a part of NY Presbyrerian Hospital Ambulatory did care Network, traits teachers to do physical or activities, including yoga, with kids in the e seen scrools in which the health-outreach to program works.

She said the program aims to show teachers howphysical activity is anecessary component of education, not just a supplement, and to show kids that exercise can happen at any time at any place—even in the classroom.

After doing her own yoga training with the instructors at Karma Kids, Zamula developed yoga moves that teachers can do with students during "brain breaks," or two-minute breaks between subjects during the school day.

"Yoga is a great way for them to clear their minds and help them focus," she said, especially as to they prepare for standardized testing. "There really is a connection between how kids feel physically and how well they'll do under a sesesment."

But the benefits of vaga in schools extend a outside the classroom. Ford said many schools r are willing to offer yaga as a gym-alternative. "It's a great activity to do with all different e ability levels and all different energy levels," she said.

all ability levels. "It's a very non-competitive environment."

Emily Henning, age 12, said, "It's really fun and relaxing. It's a time when you can hang out with your friends while getting exercise that's good for you."

"The nice thing about yoga is that there are variations on all the poses," said Vilchez-Blatt, whose classes combine students of "There's no succeeding or failing, it's trying," Ford said. She added that kids o

However, yoga can be beneficial for students who also participate in traditional competitive

aren't used, to that concept. In basketball, for example, "you either make the basket or you don't, where in yoga that's not even part of it at all." In yoga, the competition is with oneself. "Yoga is a complement to any sport," Vilchez-Blatt said. It helps to increase strength, coordination, flexibility and balance, which Emily Allen said is crucial for her favorite yoga pose.

"I like to do the 'wheel' because you have to be really good at balancing," she said.

And having more flexibility, Zamula said, allows your muscles to move in a greater ange of motion to prevent injuries and make you, for example, a better runner or a stronger football player.

"With any sport, you need cross-training and different methods of exercise to develop your body and develop your mind," she added. FOR MORE INFO ABOUT KARMA

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Teen Yoga in NYC is the Next Big Thing

By Caitlin Nish



