

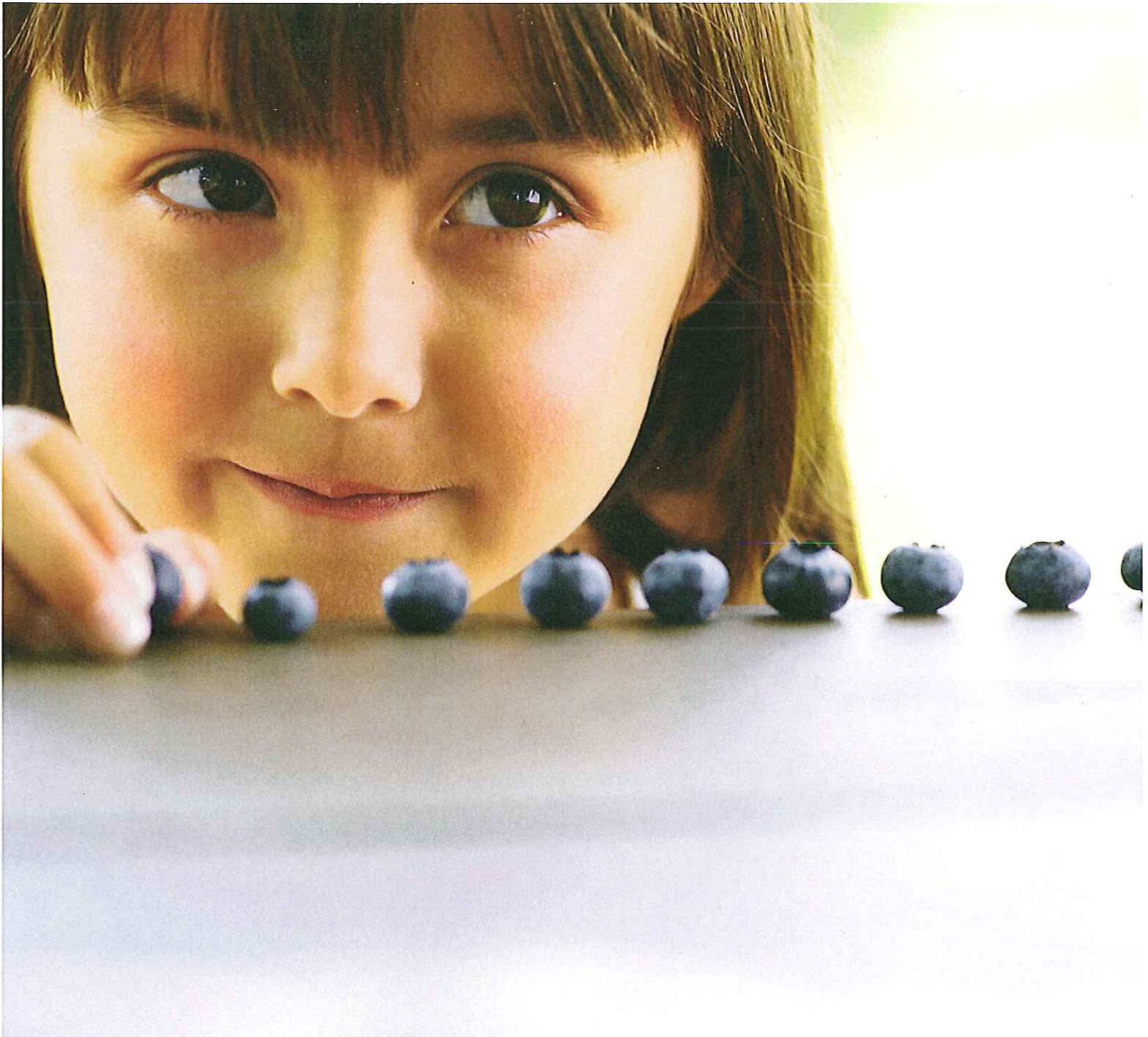
39TH + RAINBOW

THE INTERSECTION OF OPPORTUNITY AND INGENUITY

WINTER

09

THE HEALTH ISSUE



INSIGHTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS MEDICAL CENTER

Bikram Yoga Studio

Sweat, Strain and Smile

The first thing you notice is the heat.

To describe it as mere heat might not do the conditions justice: this is Saharan heat. Equatorial heat. Solar flare heat. And at 105 degrees and 40 percent humidity, you can forget about a dry heat.

This is the studio at Bikram Yoga Kansas City, which lies on 39th Street, just a few blocks east of the Medical Center. The studio, tucked away inside a seemingly innocuous urban strip mall, will provide you with one of the toughest 90-minute workouts you've ever had. All with the goal of harmonizing your body with Eastern and Western medicine.

"We focus on the physical plane, on healing the body and connecting with it," Angela Sinclair Moulin, director of Bikram Yoga Kansas City, said. "We try to work hand-in-hand with Western medicine. It can and should be complementary, and that's why we moved so close to the Medical Center."

Bikram yoga differs from conventional yoga in several important respects; the near-oppressive heat is just the most obvious one. Founded by Bikram Choudhary, Bikram yoga focuses on ridding the body of toxins by simulating a fever and on making participants endure more pain in exercise than they do in their lives.

"Bikram says it's the ego we're battling, and that you have to find yoga yourself," Moulin said. "If you are able to appreciate it, then you can find a more liberating lifestyle."

"We don't espouse spirituality, but you'll be ready to seek it if you want," Moulin added. "We want students to suffer more in the room than they do outside the room."

"It's a tough workout, but you feel more centered after the class," Kristina Ollison, a KU doctoral student in microbiology, said. "You eventually stop noticing the heat and focus on getting the postures right. That way you get the physical and mental effects of the class."

The class is a solemn affair. The instructor walks attendees through the postures and provides any help necessary, but otherwise talking is discouraged. The collective focus is on balance and harmony, on finding your maximum effort point in a given position.

"It can take up to ten classes to adapt to the heat," Moulin admitted. "But it helps your focus and attention, because you can find stillness in the positions."

Bikram yoga notes its cooperation with, not opposition to, Western medicine. Moulin said the exercise can help people with joint problems due to the so-called "tourniquet effect": by squeezing joints together in several postures, slowed blood flow cleans joints and becomes richer in oxygen.

"We want people to use yoga in addition to their doctors' advice," Moulin said. "Yoga gives awareness to the body and the mind, not just one of them."

Indeed, by the end of class people seem calmer, happier, more in touch with their inner selves – and badly in need of a cool drink.

+ Bikram Yoga Studio
on W. 39th Street