

Using a Workout to Rest Up

By SHIVANI VORA

AS a six-day-a-week exerciser who favors high-intensity workouts, I consider the seventh day enough rest. But it turns out that moving even more might be a smarter way to let my muscles recover and help me to push myself harder in the gym.

New York City has several workout options for people like me who sometimes overdo it. These classes say they help keep regular exercisers injury free and allow them to continue their strenuous routines through use of light movement and active stretching to get rid of tightness in the body.

This year Crunch gyms introduced the hourlong BodyArt, created by a physical therapist, Robert Steinbacher, to loosen muscles through a combination of cardio, yoga and Pilates. Tensions in the thigh muscles are released, for example, by squatting rapidly and breathing deeply to the backdrop of upbeat music and then holding the squat for several seconds. Calves are worked through the classic yoga downward dog and other moves.

Brandon Graham, 29, a writer who lives in Harlem, takes two BodyArt classes a week in addition to running and said that as a result of the sessions, "I have less

Where to Move Some More

BODYART AT CRUNCH (888) 227-8624, crunch.com.

RESTORE, RENEW AND REBUILD At DL Fit Pilates Wellness Studio; (212) 941-1922, dlfit.com.

THREAD AT EQUINOX (212) 774-6363, equinox.com.

BODY ROLLING AT YAMUNA (212) 633-2143, yamunastudio.com.

lower back pain than I ever did and more flexibility, so I can run more."

This fall Equinox gyms are introducing a recovery-style class with active stretching called Thread. The 30- to 45-minute sessions increase circulation by gently stretching muscles in one movement pattern. To open hip flexors, for example, students will get into a kneeling lunge and reach an arm and shoulder across the opposite thigh several times to warm them up before holding the stretch. Meanwhile instructors will prompt them to say phrases like "let go" and "ahh," so they can mentally release tension.

Other recovery classes rely more on props. The Restore, Renew and Rebuild class at DL Fit, a SoHo Pilates center, and the Body Rolling classes at Yamuna,

a downtown fitness studio, use balls to help replenish fatigued bodies. To open hips, for example, students might lie on their stomachs with a ball on each side of the hip flexors and try to sink into it for one to two minutes.

Daniel Loigerot, the owner of DL Fit, said that the gentle stress applied on the muscles released the tension from overexercising. "When you hold tension in the muscles, you are going to be sluggish and not perform as well, and these movements get rid of that, so you can work out at your optimum."

Elizabeth Wilens, 32, a real estate developer, has been a Restore loyalist for four years and said that her persistent injuries from weightlifting had disappeared. "I used to get such severe pain in my glutes that I couldn't work out at all, and as someone addicted to exercising, that was torture."

Though attractively packaged to lure in gym rats like me, these classes aren't just clever marketing, said Neal Pire, an exercise physiologist. He likens them to a shorter, easier run to help runners recover from a longer, faster one the day before. "There is real validity to recovery workouts because they increase circulation and remove muscle spasms," he said. "They work you out so you can work out hard again."

Crunch gyms offer an hour-long session called BodyArt to help those who might overdo their regular workouts. Other gyms are also offering similar classes.

