

## Metro Now

**WEEKEND ALERT**

# YOGA BY TV CAN KILL!

➤ **Shilpa, Ramdev great but a guide at hand is a must**

➤ **Copying difficult asanas can cause grievous injuries**

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**N**ext time you try out the yogic *shirsashana*, you might be causing your own life to stand on its head. Yoga keeps you fit but can cause irreparable damage unless you learn to do it properly using experience and expert advice. Without guidance, bouts of Yoga in a fitness overdrive can keep you confined to a wheelchair for the rest of your life.

MetroNow brings you cases involving health freaks who had taken to Yoga but came perilously close to death because no experts were around to tell them the right moves from the wrong ones.

Italian Mara Scarponi, 29, came to India a month ago with a few friends with the aim to tour the country and learn yoga. So, one day she decided to perform yoga, relying as she did on books and CDs that are available dime-a-dozen. **PAGE 2**



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# EXPENSIVE EXERCISE: FROM YOGA TO ICU

FROM PAGE 1 Her fascination for yoga drove her to practise this ancient Indian art of self-healing for more than a few hours every day while she was in Manali. She kept at it until one day she came perilously close to losing her life – suffering a stroke that left her paralysed neck down.

She was brought to a hospital in Chandigarh where she stayed for about nine days before being airlifted to Delhi.

"Though the reasons are unclear, we suspect some neck manipulation due to Yoga which might have led to the stroke," Dr Rajashekar Reddi, consultant neurologist at Max Institute of Neuro Sciences, where Mara was finally treated, says.

She was on a ventilator and required a tube in her mouth for feeding. The stroke had also robbed her of her power of speech. After 16 days of treatment, her condition improved just that much so that she could be put on a stretcher and flown back to Italy, accompanied by her brother.

"Mara may have suffered an injury to a vertebral artery as a result of neck manipulation during the intense yoga sessions and such injuries have been known to cause strokes, sometimes with serious neurological disorders," Dr Reddi says.

Renowned yoga instructor Suneel Kumar shares Dr Reddi's concerns. He says inspired by TV shows and self-help yoga books, people do try out certain asanas that are not supposed to be performed without being supervised by an expert. "Yoga needs to be practised in a systematic fashion. When one starts learning yoga, there are certain methods like blinking of eyes and breathing techniques that one begins with. Perhaps Mara tried the headstands or shoulderstands, which should be tried only when one has learnt yoga for at least a couple of years."

But he admits that he, too, did the headstand and the shoulderstand in his over-enthusiasm as a beginner. "My grandfather had been practising yoga for almost 70 years. When I started as a 20-year-old, I, too, tried the headstands and the shoulderstands."

They are very advanced asanas and soon I started feeling giddy, had a neck problem and even a burning sensation in the eyes." But his grandfather had intervened to warn him that these asanas should be tried only after years of practice.

Not only strokes, potential risks include permanent disability, and even death that had looked 40-year-old Kailash Gupta in the eye a little over a year ago. Like Mara, Gupta had thrown caution to the wind and started doing the headstand without expert help. Today, he is on a wheelchair.

Gupta was treated at the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre for five months for an injury suffered while performing the shirshasana. "I was in an inverted position, doing the shirshasana, or the headstand, when I slipped and broke my cervical C5 and C6," Gupta says. Gupta cannot move even his fingers these days and depends on two male servants for his daily chores.

"Inversion postures have many health benefits, but the ability of an individual to receive those depends as much on their capacity to comfortably hold these sometimes difficult postures," Pragna Gaidiyal, a yoga



Yoga spelled doom for Mara Scarponi, but yoga heals too. Former Union minister Murli Manohar Joshi's daughter Nivedita (inset) suffered a slipped disc while performing kathak at the age of 15 years and remained bed-ridden for the next 12 years. It was yoga that brought her back on her feet.

instructor at the centre, says.

Experts point out that the first important prerequisite for reaping the most benefits from inversions is to have a strong neck, a strong back, strong abdominal muscles and the capacity to breathe well while in the posture.

Even minor neck injuries, like the ones suffered while stretching the neck over the edge of a hairdresser's wash basin, have led to strokes.

"Potential risks include stroke, permanent disability and even death," Dr Reddi says.

Mara suffered an Ischemic stroke – the most common – that is caused by a clot that blocks a blood vessel in the brain.

"Stroke from chiropractic neck manipulation occurs when an artery to the brain ruptures or becomes blocked as a result of being stretched. The vertebral artery is vulnerable because it winds around the topmost cervical vertebra to enter the skull, so

that any abrupt rotation may stretch the artery and tear its delicate lining," Dr Reddi says.

He also talks about two cases of such strokes that he had handled in Chandigarh when a renowned yoga expert was conducting a workshop for thousands of people.

On the other side of peril, yoga remains a science that heals the mind and the body in more ways than one, former Union minister Murli Manohar Joshi's daughter Nivedita will bear that out. Nivedita suffered a slipped disc while performing the decidedly tough

dance form kathak at a tender age of 15 years and remained bed-ridden for the next 12.

No medicine or doctor could cure her. When all hope was lost, Nivedita sought the help of Pune's world-renowned yoga expert B.K.S. Iyengar.

Today, at 27, she is back on her feet and owes the recovery to Iyengar.

"Guru Iyengar says that a good book is better than a bad teacher. One should not blame a book or a subject. It's a person's ignorance that causes problems. Yoga is a science that has to be studied well and then practised. Also, if books could teach everything, what then is the need for a guru?" she says.



Will Mara's case taint yoga's holistic image and popularity abroad?

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