



**hoop dreams** Feel like a free-spirited child again with a new take on hula-hooping. Gaiam's Dance Hoop Kit includes a weighted, adjustable hoop and 60-minute instructional DVD featuring a workout by renowned fitness instructor Betty "Hoops" Shurin. This challenging routine offers new ways to strengthen your core, increase flexibility and engage in cardiovascular activity, making it a perfect supplement to your Pilates practice.

In case you don't remember the good ol' days, Betty begins by skillfully demonstrating proper technique. After a warm-up of stretching and performing basic hip-circling movements, Betty leads you through a series of exercises to conjure the elements (earth, water, fire, air). For water, she tells us to soften our arms and shoulders and "find fluidity in your

breath and in your body" with swim-like moves. Fire entails making fists and using our breath to intensify movements. At the end of the workout there's a cool-down. What's next, Betty: Watusi lessons? (Available at [www.gaiam.com](http://www.gaiam.com) for \$29.98.) —Amanda Altman

## NURSING BABY & YOU

*If you're thinking about switching Baby over to the bottle, think twice. When it comes to breastfeeding your*

*brood, longer is better. Research shows that the more time a mom spends breastfeeding, the better protected she is against developing diabetes. "Each year a woman breastfeeds she cuts the risk of type 2 diabetes by 15 percent," says Nurses' Health Study author Alison M. Stuebe, M.D., a clinical fellow in maternal fetal medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital, and instructor at Harvard Medical School in Boston. Type 2 is the most common form of diabetes, affecting about 9 million women in the United States.*

*Since only breast-feeding women were studied, no comparison of the incidence of diabetes was made between them and non-nursing mothers. But findings did suggest that lactation—regardless of duration—may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes overall. Since breastfeeding improves insulin sensitivity*



*and glucose tolerance, it's a wise choice.*

*If you don't have babies, choose not to breast-feed or just want to wean Junior., don't dismay. There's still plenty you can do to stave off diabetes. Diet, exercise and battling obesity all contribute to helping you stay diabetes-free.* —TW

# pillow talk

“A good laugh and a long sleep,” the old Irish saying goes, “are the best cures in the doctor’s book.” But when restful sleep eludes you, good luck finding anything to laugh about.

If you spend the night



tossing and turning or wake up less than fully rested, your pillow might be to blame, says Keith Overland, D.C., former chiropractor to the New York Mets and the U.S. Olympic speed-skating team, now practicing in Norwalk, CT. He stresses the importance of using pillows to create neutral spine position during sleep. “A pillow needs to fill in the contours under the head and neck,” he says. His advice: Figure out, based on your physique and sleep position, which pillow will depress beneath your

head and provide firm support under your neck.

The array of material choices is mind-boggling—everything from hypoallergenic memory foam to good old goose down. But there are no right or wrong choices, he says. “People have to find a material that’s comfortable to them.” Here’s his assessment of common pillow choices.

Water pillows offer customized support. Just fill them with as much water as needed to fit your shape. Cervical pillows have a depression for your head and support for your neck. Those made of memory foam form to your particular shape. They retain heat, which can be a problem for people who overheat.

Body pillows don’t replace neck pillows but—when hugged with both arms and placed between the legs—help side-sleepers keep their spines neutral by creating a space between the knees and reducing twisting in the

low back. Back-sleepers: Put a regular pillow beneath your knees for a similar effect.

In general, Overland recommends sleeping on your back or side, with knees bent. “By bending your knees, you’re taking stress off your back muscles and putting your body into its most neutral posture,” he says. Stomach sleepers are setting themselves up for neck problems down the road by constantly applying pressure to a rotated cervical spine, he notes. You’ll know you’ve made the right pillow choice when you awaken fully rested, full of energy, and ready to tackle the day.

—Deirdre Shevlin Bell

## mat personality

We express our individuality through our style, art and values. Why not let a little of our inner selves shine through in our Pilates practice? With this in mind, Florida-based fitness instructor Debbie Wolff has launched **myOMmat.com**, which allows you to customize your Pilates mat (\$29.95 to \$34.95). Choose from 15 colors and five typefaces to make your mat your own.

Whether you inscribe your name, logo or a favorite expression, Om mats are the perfect way to stand out in class. (They’re also a great way to never lose your favorite mat again.)

**Power Systems** brings its usual style and innovation to mats with this new offering. A foam inner layer is sandwiched between shock-absorbing and skid-resisting materials to insure safety and comfort. Tailor your mat by size and color: 36, 48, 56 or 68 inches, in lime, blue or black (\$12.95 to \$29.95; powersystems.com).

Calling all tree huggers! **Jade Yoga**, the makers of Harmony mats, has recently partnered with Trees for the Future, a nonprofit organization that supports ecological development and helps you do the Hundred while helping hundreds of lives. The cushy mats of renewable rubber come in nine shades, three thicknesses and two lengths (\$40 to \$90; jade-yoga.com). —AA

