

No more 'nasty' yoga tools

Mats at health clubs will persuade you to buy your own

BY PAIGE WISER
Staff Reporter

Fides Julian has been practicing yoga in Chicago for about five years. But she doesn't remember ever using the communal mats that health clubs provide. "Nasty," she shudders.

She bought her own rubber mat because it's organic, and because it doesn't give off the weird odor that other mats do.

But the main reason? Cleanliness.

"I have never gone [to a health club] and seen that they've cleaned the mats," Julian says.

Most health clubs are supposed to clean them regularly by wiping them down with disinfectant and/or washing them in machines. Crunch Fitness gyms, for instance, officially



ABOVE:
Holy Cow is a kinder, gentler yoga mat cleaner.



AT LEFT:
Yoga Mat Spray is a weapon of microscopic destruction.

aim to wash the mats once a day — but it's up to each gym to oversee it in practice.

Yoga veteran Julian isn't taking anything on faith. Borrow a mat, she says, and "you're sharing other people's sweat."

That's not enough, health experts say. Yoga continues to be more popular than ever — Yoga Journal estimates that 16.5 million people practiced it in 2005, up 43 percent from 2002. At the same time, podiatrists are seeing more cases of athlete's foot and plantar warts that could be related to mats.

Dr. Joe Rubino, a microbiologist with Lysol, says lingering bacteria on mats can lead to infections, boils and impetigo. Even worse, the "much-dreaded" methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria can survive on a yoga mat and infect the body through an open wound, says Dr. R. Doug Hardy. It can cause red, swollen, painful skin — and

even lead to death.

Now, *that's* enlightening.

Many health clubs, Gold's Gyms included, provide anti-septic solutions so that practitioners can disinfect their own mats. Hardy recommends covering up any cuts or open sores. "Wipe off a sweaty mat prior to use, and always wash your hands after use," he says.

Lysol makes a disinfecting wipe that will do the trick, Rubino says.

◆ **B.Y.O.M.** Buying a mat makes sense, even for a beginner. Costs can be as low as \$7.99 for an "irregular" mat at www.matsmatsmats.com.

◆ **Get a grip.** Yoga is traditionally practiced barefoot, but gloves and thin boots put a layer between you and whatever may be hanging around on your mat. A pair of gloves are \$14.98 at www.yogagrip-gloves.com.

◆ **Kill, kill, kill.** Disinfect your mat: Custom-made Yoga Mat Spray is available for \$8.99 at www.yogaaccessories.com.

Holy Cow is a cleaner that's organic. \$3 to \$4 at www.holy-cowproducts.com.

And don't forget it's easier to reach nirvana when your mat doesn't reek. Try Febreze Antimicrobial Spray, which is \$5.29 at www.drugstore.com.

Yoga gloves are one more layer of protection between you and the sweat of a thousand yogis. \$14.98, www.yogagripgloves.com

